

Inis

the *Children's Books Ireland* magazine

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The extraordinary work of Vivian Gussin Paley

Illustrator profile: Annie West

Duanaire: Poetry from Scoil Naithí

Oisín McGann: his early influences

Chatting with Jan Mark



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editorial

On phases... and listening



AS I write this, Harry Potter fever is building up to the climax of the launch of the sixth book in the series: *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Yet by the time you read this, it'll be old hat – millions of copies will have been sold, read and enjoyed, and wizard hats and HP specs will have been carefully put away till next time. Many children will be already counting the months to the launch of the seventh and last book in the series – others, whose happiness may have depended on getting their hands on the book at one minute past midnight, may already have moved on to a new phase and found something else to satisfy their hunger for fantasy and adventure. However, as with the moon, we have to respect these phases and go with them as they're happening. Whether it's bugs or ballet, pirates or dinosaurs, witches or wizards, there is a book out there which is exactly right for each interest – we just have to find it! One book reviewed on page 41, *Captain Flinn and the Pirate Dinosaurs*, cleverly manages to embrace two phases that lasted a long time in a certain family I

letters

Dear Editor,

With great good humour, Jabberwock describes the author visit from hell in *Inis* 12; nevertheless it is a serious matter that s/he raises. Engaging and heartening as contact can be with readers, far too many author visits fall into the 'from hell' category, and unfortunately these hellish occasions happen more often than they should in public libraries. I want to stress that I have had some wonderful experiences of well-managed visits to libraries, and library staff are rarely and certainly never wholly at fault when the visit from hell occurs. The problem is that there is a faultline in the whole format of the author visit to libraries, and faultlines have a horrible habit of leading to earthquakes. Here's what happens. First someone in head office (or possibly the organiser of a local arts festival) creates a wonderful programme of author events for children and then he or she goes looking for an audience for this wonderful programme. That's possibly a mistake. Even the best author in the world will not attract an audience unless the audience is

interested in the author (or at least in books) to start with, or can be enticed into being interested. Just inviting an author does not create an audience. Audience-building should come first, then comes the author visit. That makes sense, but it doesn't always seem to occur to people planning author-event programmes. Next the person with the good ideas, invariably someone who is full of enthusiasm and passion for books, sends out the glad tidings to far-flung libraries about the county that Lucky Library A has been chosen to consume Unfortunate Author X, whether they want to or not, and whether or not the local school has the slightest interest in the project. And so the hapless junior librarian in Lucky Library A approaches the local school and offers them Unfortunate Author X – on a plate, free, gratis and for nothing, for consumption on Day N at 2 pm. Now, it is a sad fact of human nature that things offered free, gratis and for nothing on a plate (like the head of Holofernes) tend to be only half-heartedly consumed. And so it often is with the author visit. The school has other things on its mind – naturally – and now here is this person from the library on the phone saying, 'The author says sixth class, but sure I suppose fifth would do just as well if sixth is too busy.' But then it turns out that it's fifth class's day at the swimming pool, so fourth class is to be pressed into service, but gee, fourth class is playing a match that afternoon against third, but look, here's

know. You'll find lots of ideas and recent titles listed and reviewed in *Book Fest 2005* – a Recommended Reading Guide that's worth its weight in gold (and it's free by the way) to any teacher, parent, aunt, uncle or grandparent interested in sourcing good books for children. *Book Fest 2005* is edited by Sarah Webb and Mary McLaughlin and their team of section editors and reviewers, and is available from your local library and bookshops from late September, or from the CBI office.

Amid the recent press flurry surrounding the new Harry Potter book, one aspect of the JK Rowling success story caught my attention. Ms Rowling had approached Bloomsbury in her third attempt to find a publisher. Nigel Newton, the chairman of Bloomsbury recently acceded that he was pushed to publish as a result of the pressure from his then 8-year-old daughter Alice, who had read the manuscript. He listened, and the HP phenomenon began. So listening is at the heart of successful publishing, as well as parenting and teaching, it seems. Children tell us what they want and need – we adults just have to keep our senses attuned.

Like little Trixie in the utterly charming book *Knuffle Bunny*, reviewed on page 39. Through a series of realistic photographic backdrops overlaid with cartoon-style characters, the pre-verbal Trixie does her utmost to 'tell' her father that she has left her beloved Knuffle Bunny in the launderette. Or put another way, the significant adult just isn't listening! Recommended for any family in a bunny phase.

Vivian Gussin Paley certainly knows how to listen. You can read about her unique approach to teaching and using stories in the classroom on page 13. Her book, *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, should be required reading for every adult who interacts with children. Student teachers particularly, take note.

Wishing you a stimulating and enjoyable term – whatever phase you're going through.



Paddy O'Doherty

this free author on a plate above in the library, that's a chance too good to miss. And so second class turns up, their mittens trailing out of their coat sleeves, all agog for 'the storytime'. And there's Author X with a book about the perils of puberty. And what about the second-class teacher who has brought the kids along? Well, he has a bit of internet surfing to catch up on and what else is the library for after all? All hell breaks loose in the children's area, where the hapless author is gaping in horror at the tiny tots she has been confronted with, having specified sixth class, if not first year. The author turns to the librarian to say, 'Gosh, this really isn't on, you know,' but the poor librarian, covered in embarrassment – and God knows it's not her fault, she never asked for this situation – is cowering behind her computer, lost in the fascinating world of ISBNs. The author has a small nervous breakdown in a corner, but no one notices because second class is now climbing all over the seats. These things happen all the time in libraries up and down the country. I know. I have been Author X. My worst experience was worse than that. My worst experience was a WHOLE RURAL SCHOOL turning up. OK, it was a small school, but that's not the point. Oh yes, and a two-year-old who happened to be visiting the library chose the occasion of my talk to TAKE OFF HER DRESS, to the vast amusement of the WHOLE RURAL SCHOOL. I was trying to engage. Then a Securicor van parked

outside the window and A MAN WITH A GUN started running up and down on the pavement. I am not making this up. All these things happened, and all on the same occasion. These things happen not because there is anything wrong with how librarians operate (heaven forbid) or because schools are uninterested in books and reading (God forbid). These things happen because there is, as I say, a faultline in the whole system of author visits to libraries, and this is what defines that faultline: there is a gap between control and responsibility. The libraries have the responsibility for the visit, but because of how these things work, they are more or less forced to hand over control on the day to the schools. Doubtless there are librarians who plan author visits in consultation with local teachers and in response to perceived needs and interests, but I suspect that many author visits that go well often do so purely by luck. Libraries are wonderful places. The concept of the public library, a space dedicated to books and reading, freely accessible to all from a young age and for life, is a marvellously inspiring idea, and I am so in favour of libraries. But I have to admit that when the phone rings and it's a library, my heart sinks. That is really very sad. But it is true. And it is based on experience. Can someone, somewhere, please rethink the way that author visits to libraries are organised? Please? Please? Oh, please! Beir Bua,

Siobhán Parkinson

Illustrator profile: Annie West

Terrie O'Sullivan

ROTUND, copper-coloured little red hens, doe-eyed farmers, Gaudí-style buildings, luminous orange and blue mosaic fish and delicate butterflies are only part of the dazzling portfolio of Glasgow-born illustrator, Annie West. Annie returned home to Ireland with her Irish parents when she was three years old.

In early childhood she ignored the text of favourite books and 'read' the illustrations to find the story. Coming from an engineering and academic background, she was first 'formally introduced' to painting and colour at the age of five in 'high babies class' in primary school. Having 'won brownie points for being good at

“ She loved to browse the pages of the *Illustrators' Guild of Ireland* annuals in the College Library ”

art' she was given access to teacher Mrs Barber's paintbox and the rest is history, as they say.

Following her family's move to Dublin from the leafy lanes of Clane, Co. Kildare, Annie chose art as a subject for her Leaving Certificate instead of home economics. After secondary school she studied at Dún Laoghaire College of Art and Design where according to Annie, her confidence in her ability as an artist was fostered and nurtured by Trevor Scott who was principal of the college. She also loved to browse the pages of the *Illustrators' Guild of Ireland* annuals in the College Library, which she feels helped her develop her indi-

vidual style. She emerged from her chrysalis as a hopeful, talented adolescent, to graduate in 1979 with a diploma in design for communications, and as the recipient of the Alfred Beit, Nora McGuinness and the NCEA Patent Practitioners Awards.

She commenced her professional artistic life in graphic design, working at Words and Pictures, a subsidiary of Wilson Hartnell Advertising and Marketing and then moved to freelancing as a graphic designer with both the National Museum and the National Library of Ireland. She also worked on children's programmes with RTÉ (Irish



Annie at work in her studio

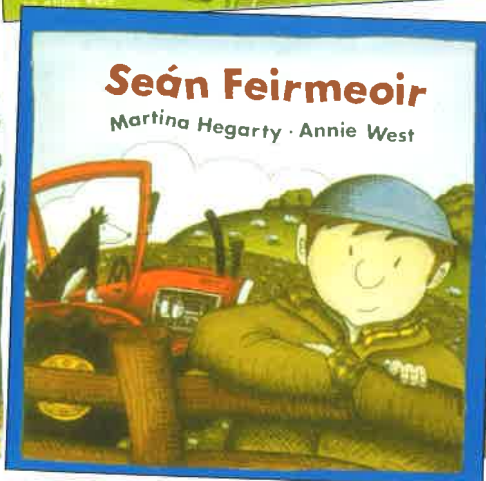
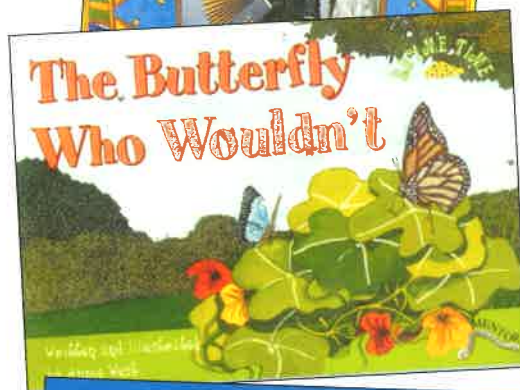
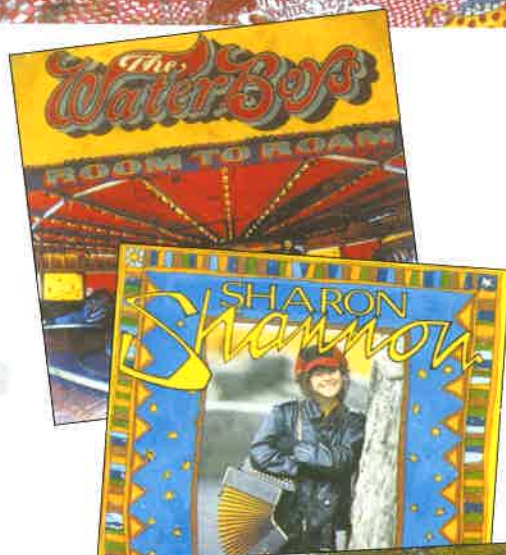


national television) as a design assistant. While in the UK she became involved in television design and also worked on several films including two Neil Jordan productions: *High Spirits* and *The Miracle*, as assistant art director.

On her return to graphic design in 1989 she was commissioned to work on posters and CD covers for various Irish bands, artists

“She won the IGI Best Book Illustration Award again in 2004 for *Cearc an Phrompa*

and events, including Clannad, Hothouse Flowers, The Waterboys and the Sligo Arts Festival. At this time she was also working on book illustrations for various publishers including Mentor Books, Folens and Coiscéim. In 1991 her cover design for *Dán na hUidre* by author Biddy Jenkinson, published by Coiscéim, was awarded the Uí Súilleabháin Award and was highly commended in the Irish Book

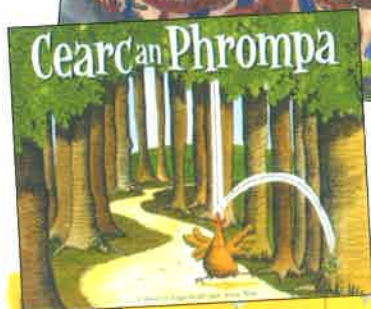


Design Awards. By 1994 she had illustrated more than a dozen book covers and her work for Irish publishers had fostered her interest in illustrating children's books.

By 1999 she had written and illustrated *The Butterfly Who Wouldn't* for Mentor Books closely followed by *What's That Up There?* and *Olivia's Orchestra*. Her work for Folens Publishers involved spot cartoons for their educational annuals. In 2003 Annie's illustrations for

The Little Red Hen for Brimax Books in London, which was subsequently sold to American publishers McGraw-Hill, claimed the prestigious Illustrators' Guild of Ireland Award for Best Book Illustration. She won the IGI Best Book Illustration Award again in 2004 for *Cearc an Phrompa* (Cló Mhaigh Eo, 2004). She recently held an exhibition of her work in Sligo on the theme of *Alice in Wonderland*, a book that was a childhood favourite. She has also received corporate and private commissions for architectural illustrations of public buildings (Sligo Courthouse), shop fronts and private homes.

Annie works from home and her typical day revolves around taking care of her family – she has three daughters – and working to a strict schedule. After she



sees the girls off to school, coffee and the newspapers follow a 50-minute walk across the fields below Ben Bulben. She confesses that the challenge of a new venture makes oven cleaning, floor washing, shampooing the cat and counting the stairs a very attractive option. However, once she starts on a commission she is very disciplined. She is at her

drawing board by 9 am and continues working non-stop until the children arrive home from school at 3 pm. When they are fed and watered once again and homework is supervised and completed, the children take time out on the

She is most particular regarding the quality of paper used for her illustrations

farm and Annie snatches another few hours work out of her busy schedule. If she is under pressure to finish a particular piece of work, she will have a late siesta when the children go to bed and then work through until midnight with Vincent Browne's nightly talk show for company. She found this routine especially suited her when she worked long hours under pressure while involved in television and films in the UK.

Despite her obvious talent and expertise, she confides that she finds all

She was given total control of the content and revelled in making the illustrations as zany as possible

her work challenging. She is extremely professional, working diligently to a time frame and delivering her completed work on time to clients. To facilitate this reliability she has devised a specific methodology, which she finds works well for her. She reads the text of the story she has been asked to illustrate, takes time out to let her ideas 'ferment' and then reads it once again. She sometimes uses a long train journey to help her focus on the work in hand, making preliminary sketches in a notebook. From these drawings she develops a 'storyboard' that gives an overview of the whole story which then leads on to what Annie calls 'dog roughs'. These are refined and sent to publishers by either post or email – which she prefers as it helps speed up the delivery of her artwork.

To ensure a continuous flow of work, Annie will then follow the same routine with her next assignment while awaiting the return of her 'roughs' from the publishers. When these are returned she will make changes if necessary and start work on the final illustrations. Because of the immense amount of work involved in a commission, she is most particular regarding the quality of paper used for her illustrations. Good quality paper brings illustrations to life whereas cheaper paper can

give lifeless flat images. She has also learnt, while working with Nick Van Vliet at Words and Pictures, the organisational skill of keeping everything relating to a piece of completed artwork, including phone numbers, jottings and doodles. These are transferred into a transparent envelope and carefully labelled and stored.

Annie obviously enjoys her work and when asked, she agreed that she had particularly enjoyed working on the illustrations for *Cearc an Phrionpa* with Colmán Ó Raghallaigh and Cló Mhaigh Eo in 2004. She was given total control of the content and revelled in making the illustrations as zany as possible – including a lion amongst the farmyard animals. The ‘human’ facial expressions of



surprise, disbelief and puzzlement highlighted the hysteria of the animals in the story of the sky falling. Her affinity with farms, farm families and their animals is also obvious in her illustrations for Martina Hegarty's story of the everyday life of *Seán Feirmeoir* (An Gúm, 2004) which is suitable for an older age group of children. Annie specialises in extremely detailed line and ink drawings which, combined with her skill with colour, brings movement and life to her illustrations.

Having just completed major work for her exhibition, Annie's present work-in-progress includes writing and illustrating a series of six children's stories of classic tales for the Educational Company. She is also working on a book entitled *Les the Polar Bear* and collaborating with a friend on a new venture which is secret but very exciting.

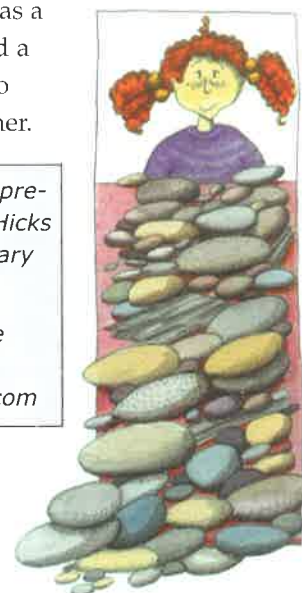
Despite her many successes in the vast area of design and illustration, Annie West is unbelievably self-effacing about her work. Her warm sense of humour comes across in many of her illustrations

“ Her warm sense of humour comes across in many of her illustrations ”

but the labour intensive effort involved in all her artwork also indicates a deep sense of commitment to her work. Her natural sense of colour, awareness of shape and composition, witty expressions, together with a vivid imagination, make Annie West one of the most original and exciting illustrators working in Ireland today. It was a delight and a privilege to interview her.

Annie West is represented by Sophie Hicks at Ed Victor Literary Agency

Annie can be contacted at info@anniewest.com



CBI Summer School 2005 'It made the stuff in my head jump'

Irene Barber

THIS was not a good Summer School,' to quote a sporting personality, '...it was a great Summer School'.

From the very beginning on Friday evening, we felt we were in confident, friendly capable hands. This impression was formed by the welcome of chairperson Geraldine Meade and the introductory remarks by CBI director Mags Walsh – an impression which became a certainty as the weekend progressed, thanks to this formidable duo assisted by board members and the administrative staff.

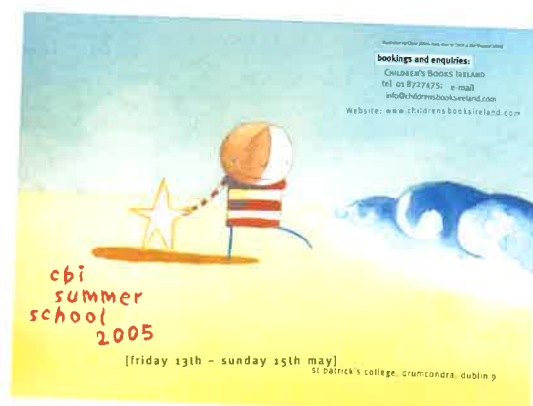
The opening speaker was Jan Mark, twice Carnegie Medal winner. She explained, with a rather distant delivery, that when writing, she made three drafts, the first long hand, and that contrary to what we all preach to budding writers, she makes it up as she goes along. By choice, she will let a novel 'sit' before she produces the

“The Summer School Award was presented to a 'gob-smacked' Liz Morris for her untiring work”

final version. She let us in on her secret that it is not characters or settings that she reuses in subsequent books, but ideas. Museums feature largely and also more recently a preoccupation with dead bodies. Jan Mark then engaged warmly in a question and answer session.

The Summer School Award was presented to a 'gob-smacked' Liz Morris for her untiring work for such organisations as CLAI, CBI, IBBY (Ireland) and in her professional sphere, for bringing books and children together in all kinds of weather. She was referred to as a kind of 'Rough Guide to Children's Books' and that was meant in the nicest possible way! A popular choice.

Then it was all books and wine and wine and more books. John Treacy of International Education Services is to be congratulated for the care with which he single-handedly stocked the Summer School bookshop. Speakers' books



were there together with a comprehensive selection of children's books for all ages.

First thing on Saturday morning we had an information session on the Governor General's Literary Awards in Canada. We learned that there are no less than four children's awards in Canada: text and illustration in French and the same in English. There is also a translator's award. This award is nearly 50 years old and so is very well established. I'm sure the CBI/Bisto people were listening very closely.

On Friday night Jan Mark expressed the opinion that "if I wrote series I would have gone mad long ago". So we looked with



Liz Morris (left) with Siobhán Parkinson

“All books imply a trilogy: every story must have a prequel and a sequel”

renewed interest at the panel of Irish series writers in front of us on Saturday morning. No ranting, no hairs on the palms of the hands, no sign of madness here, just Aubrey Flegg's careful mellifluous tones, and Oisín McGann's buzzing energy and Cormac Mac Raois's relaxed wisdom. They discussed if there were particular problems with the second book of a trilogy, though as Cormac wisely stated all books imply a trilogy: every story must have a prequel and a sequel. The challenge of series writing, where each book has to be somewhat the same and somewhat different, was discussed.

No ranting here but the next session with a panel of Liam Mac Uistín, Colmán Ó Raghallaigh and Ré Ó Laighléis was not so calm. This session was in Irish with simultaneous translation provided.

While there is lots to celebrate in publishing for children in Irish,

“They spoke with passion and insight about religious differences in Glasgow and Belfast and of apartheid in South Africa”

this panel did not manage to move beyond much of the negativity that surrounds the area. The debate was unfocused and offered no resolutions only a litany of problems that have been aired many times before. Indeed some of the comments could be classed as pot shots.

The 'two-minute favourites' slot was back by popular demand.

organisations such as CBI and IBBY? The day ended on a lighter note with a charming and award-winning Rodman Philbrick remembering drinking whiskey with Mary Lavin in Dublin in the early 1970s. While the themes of his books (alienation and difference) were as weighty as those of the writers in the previous session, they were treated with humour

TWO-MINUTE FAVOURITES

SPEAKER	TITLE/S	AUTHOR
Anna Browne	<i>Arabat</i>	Clive Barker
Catherine Cotter	<i>The Seeing Stone</i>	Kevin Crossley Holland
Margrit Cruickshank	<i>Winnie the Pooh/Jungle Book/Heidi</i>	Boccaccio/Decameron (yes, she cheated!)
Judy Deacon	<i>Brilliance of the Moon</i>	Liam Hearne
Jennifer Flegg	<i>The Dog Crusoe</i>	RM Ballantyne
John McElligot	<i>Jackanory and the King of Ireland's Son</i>	As told by Bryan MacMahon
Maighread Medbh	<i>Mary Poppins</i>	The movie, seen in Limerick with her mother and sister
Diane Orr	<i>Der Grenzgänger</i>	Ulla Klomp
Maedhbh Rogan	<i>Avocado Baby</i>	John Burningham
Audrey Smith	<i>The Runaway Settlers</i>	Elsie Locke
Sarah Webb	<i>The Second Best Children in the World</i> <i>Busy, Busy World</i>	Mary Lavin Richard Scarry

Thanks to Anna Browne's young reader for the comment on *Arabat* which I stole for the title of this piece. 'It made the stuff in my head jump' is meant as a comment on the Summer School rather than the effect of too much free wine.

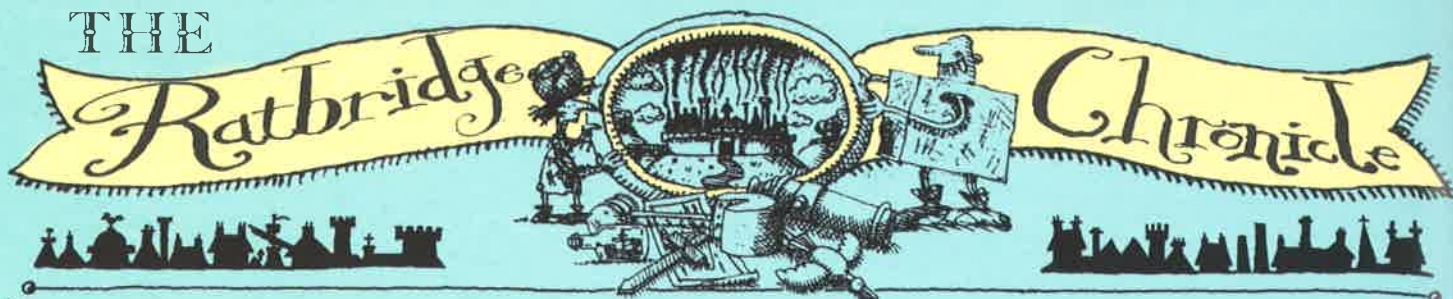
After lunch (adequate rather than mouth-watering) we had a challenging session about conflict with Kate MacLachlan, Theresa Breslin and Beverly Naidoo. They spoke with passion and insight about religious differences in Glasgow and Belfast and of apartheid in South Africa. The view was expressed that in order to cross boundaries we must engage imaginatively. What better *raison d'être* for promoting reading and for

and Phibrick's self-deprecatory revelations (yo, Mr Big Shot Writer, your book sucks) were well received.

The second information session of the weekend was about the impressive work of the Derry-based Verbal Arts Centre: storytelling, events, activities and educational projects. The Centre obviously has a very strong education mission and its work with student and newly qualified teachers in promoting storytelling was certainly designed for success.

Next up was the 'Something Beginning With P' team: Seamus Cashman (editor), Íde Ní Laoghaire (editorial director at

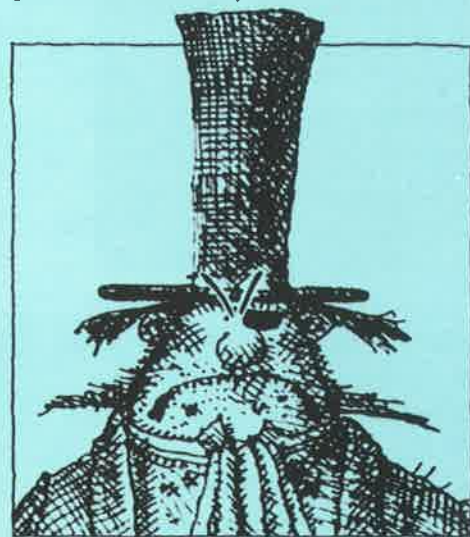
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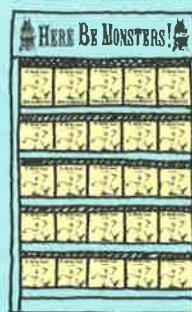
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Alan Snow is a renowned illustrator and animator having worked at Aardman. His previous titles include the best-selling **HOW SANTA REALLY WORKS** and **THE TRUTH ABOUT CATS**.

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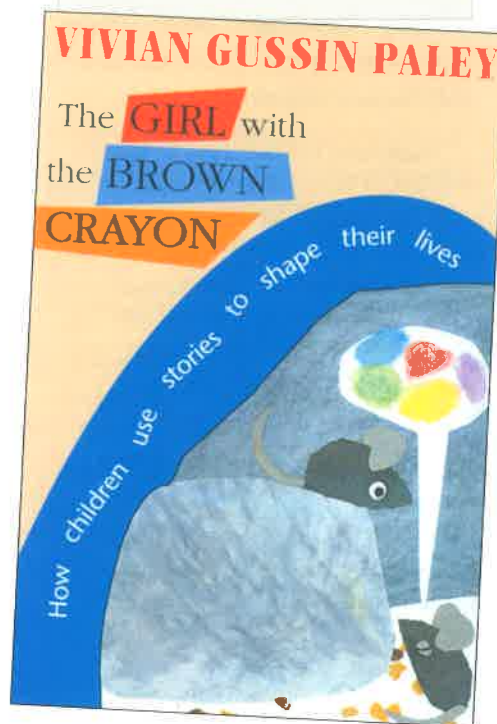
The extraordinary work of Vivian Gussin Paley and Leo Lionni

Annie O'Doherty

THIS slim paperback was awarded the Harvard University Press annual prize for an outstanding publication about education and society. It comes as no surprise either that *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* is a central text for a module on children's literature in the University of Wisconsin, where the course outline states that this book 'implies an attitude toward children, books, and teaching that is quite profoundly different from what most of us have encountered'.

In this book Paley documents and describes her classroom experiences as a teacher of 5-year-olds over the course of her final year before retirement. The curriculum is allowed to emerge with a clear focus on the picturebooks of one author/illustrator: Leo Lionni. This focus is inspired by the enthusiasm of one particular child, Reeny, who becomes increasingly fascinated by the underlying themes and images in Lionni's books. The brown crayon refers to Reeny's consistent choice when colouring in her 'girl' drawings, creating accurate representations of her own skin tone. Cutting out her brown girls, she posts them on the wall around the room, saying 'This brown girl

Vivian Gussin Paley
*The Girl with the Brown Crayon:
How Children Use Stories to
Shape their Lives*
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
Press, 1997



that's dancing is me'. The brown crayon is symbolic of Reeny's assured awareness: 'a girl with a talent for self-identity'.

As a kindergarten teacher with 35 years' experience in the University of Chicago Lab School, Paley is well known for her innovative technique of using children's own stories to create a curriculum that



... her innovative technique of using children's own stories to create a curriculum that explores the narrative process

explores the narrative process. As a practitioner, Paley takes the 'stories' children naturally tell as part of their everyday play, and makes them part of her daily curriculum. Her method is simple: the children are invited to dictate their 'stories', which the teacher writes down, verbatim. These stories may be just a couple of lines or up to one page long. Later in the day in 'big group' time, the children are given the opportunity to dramatise their stories, and each 'author' in turn gets to cast the characters they will need (including inanimate objects: 'Who will be the wind?').

The brown crayon refers to Reeny's consistent choice when colouring in her ... own skin tone

Kindergarteners are passionate seekers of hidden identities

The benefits of this program are many. Children see that spoken language can be written down, and then read. This helps them to see that the reading and writing experience can be very meaningful to them in their own lives, in as much as their fantasies, fears, etc. can be material for this narrative experience.

'Once there was a princess' Reeny dictates after lunch. 'And a mother and father. They was the King and queen.'

'Do you want to say "They were the king and queen"?''

'They is the king and queen.' She hurries on lest I interrupt again. 'And the princess was walking in the forest deeply and she got lost.'

'In the forest deeply is nice,' I offer, to which Reeny says

'Thank you.' She knows the difference between literary commentary and personal criticism.

In *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* Paley explores the books of Leo Lionni in remarkable depth. She follows the children into unexplored territory: 'Where Reeny goes we shall follow. Kindergarteners are passionate seekers of hidden identities'.

We see how a child will look to

see an image of themselves portrayed, either in the visual images or in the text, gaining insight into their own personality, their friends, and their world.

Reeny comes upon Frederick, a mouse created by Lionni, and ponders his character as well as appearance:

'That brown mouse seem to be just like me!' she announces, staring at the cover of *Frederick*. 'Because I'm always usually thinking 'bout colours and words the same as him.'

Reeny sets about drawing brown mice like Frederick, and soon five children are drawing mice:

'These kind of eyes is the hardest to do'. 'He so... quiet.' 'He's thinking... You hasta be quiet for thinking.'

Identity is one important theme in his books: the *Frederick* story is about being accepted although different – a non-conformist character, whereas Tico, in another Lionni book, is rejected by his own folk when he changes. Being accepted or rejected are familiar experiences in early childhood.

By creating their own dramatic productions, children reveal how sophisticated their thinking and language can be, accomplishing far more than is possible using traditional classroom exercises. A connection is forged between the child's natural narrative and the written word. The children invent '...their own literature of themes and metaphors, of characters and

plots, they will learn to listen well to each other's ideas and step respectfully into each other's stories'. The process is propelled by the need children have to connect their ideas to the ideas of others, turning 'let's pretend' into narrative continuity for the whole room.

By creating their own dramatic productions, children reveal how sophisticated their thinking and language can be

Paley's working methods are the very antithesis of lesson plans, and truly challenge our assumptions about the teaching process. Story and play are the original learning tools, according to Paley, and if play is undervalued or eliminated as part of the curriculum, the 'model for story making is eliminated as well'. Her storytelling technique taps into what is real for the children, it anchors their fantasy and purpose. In play nothing surprises a child, anything can happen – just as in stories. They *expect* to understand. Play is their language, and story is their second language.

In *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* we see Paley's method of using books and stories in an intense and focused way, indeed the subtitle promises to reveal 'How Children Use Stories to Shape Their Lives'. Paley becomes intrigued by Lionni, 'this mysteriously provocative writer', and chooses to allow his books to shape the curriculum. Over the year, she explores Lionni's

Paley's working methods are the very antithesis of lesson plans, and truly challenge our assumptions about the teaching process

books with her class, one by one, analysing the issues, raising children's self-awareness and developing their sense of community. Lionni's stories and themes look simple on the face of it, but after consideration are far from simple. Paley unpicks the detail to understand the many layers, allowing the children to tease out the issues that emerge, leading to some very sophisticated discussions.

Writing and illustrating picture books throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s, Leo Lionni has been described as a 20th century Aesop, creating stories with animal characters to reflect real personality struggles.

One of the first picturebook illustrators to use collage, Lionni's ideas are as clean and graphic as his art. He creates animal fables with layered meanings, profoundly deep and at the same time readily appealing to young children.

Lionni was born in Amsterdam, and spent much of his childhood sketching. An unusual child, he liked to sketch in the great hall of the Rijksmuseum while his friends played soccer in the park. He was

Leo Lionni creates animal fables with layered meanings

the protagonists in his fables. His working career led him to America where (before creating any books for children) he was design director of the Olivetti Corporation, a lecturer at Yale, an art director of one of the largest advertising agencies in America, co-editor of *Print*, and art director of *Fortune* magazine. His own grandchildren led him to the picturebook as a medium for his creativity.

In a wide range of picturebooks, Lionni explores values, attitudes, identity, belonging, friendship, life choices and other dilemmas and matters of concern to a pre-literate audience. Am I different? Do I belong here? Do I need friends? Will I be lonely? Should I submit or go against the others? These universal themes of empathy and friendship are readily understood by children.

dilemmas: Tico is faced with the choice to keep what he wants and face the annoyance of the group, or to do without and placate them, whereas Cornelius faces resistance to his ideas, but submits to no one, and will not compromise, choosing to leave the group rather than accommodate them. One child understands how Tico feels and another identifies with Cornelius. Reeny identifies with Frederick, who is a thinker and a poet.

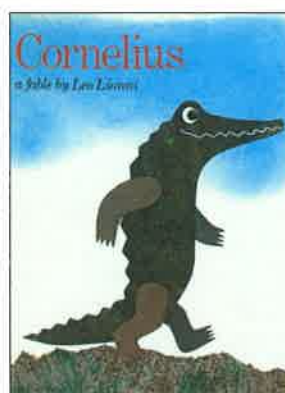
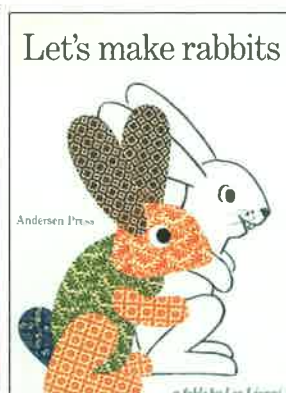
On the surface these are simple stories about predictably appealing animal characters; the depth and dilemma is only revealed when the children discuss what the story means to them. It appears that there is an individual Lionni char-

These universal themes of empathy and friendship are readily understood by children

acter for each child to identify with; as Paley comments 'If you are a Cornelius or a Frederick, compromise is not an option.' But if you're an Inchworm, you may be uncomfortable being required to work to another's agenda.

Paley's approach to each Lionni book is the same, first the book is read aloud many times, almost to the point of memorising it, then the story is dramatised, and the children draw or paint the characters – creating large posters for the wall. Then the finer points are discussed:

... comparing new characters to those we already know and to those in other books as well. The characters enter our stories, our play and our ordinary conversation.



also very interested in natural history, and in his bedroom he built terrariums of sand, pebbles, moss and water for frogs, snails or mice. Lionni was besotted both by art and by nature throughout his life, and these same creatures later became

Lionni's achievement involves taking one of these deep abstract issues and reducing it down to its simplest form, presenting it in a way that can be communicated to and understood by a child. The characters he creates face various

Leo Lionni

Leo Lionni was born in Amsterdam in 1910. He pursued a career in the world of graphic art, print and advertising in America. Later in life he divided his time between New York and a farmhouse in Tuscany. His own grandchildren inspired him to begin writing children's books at the age of 49.

Leo Lionni was honored with an American Institute of Graphic Arts Gold Medal and he received four Caldecott Honor Book Silver Medals for his children's books. He died at the age of 89 in 1999.

Lionni's books include:

- It's Mine!* New York: Knopf, 1986
- Cornelius* New York: Pantheon, 1983
- Let's Make Rabbits: A Fable* New York: Pantheon, 1982
- Geraldine the Music Mouse* New York: Pantheon, 1979
- Pezzettino* New York: Pantheon, 1975
- In the Rabbitgarden* New York: Pantheon, 1975
- The Greentail Mouse* New York: Pantheon, 1973
- Fish is Fish* New York: Pantheon, 1970
- Alexander and the Wind-up Mouse* New York: Pantheon, 1969
- The Biggest House in the World* New York: Pantheon, 1968
- Swimmy* New York: Pantheon, 1967
- Frederick* New York: Pantheon, 1967
- Tico and the Golden Wings* New York: Pantheon, 1964
- Inch by Inch* New York: Obolensky, 1960
- Little Blue and Little Yellow* New York: McDowell Obolensky, 1959

Vivian Gussin Paley

Vivian Gussin Paley received the NCTE 2004 Outstanding Educator in the English Language Arts Award, the MacArthur Fellowship in 1989, and the Erikson Institute Award for Service to Children in 1987, the American Book Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1998, and the John Dewey Society's Outstanding Achievement Award in 2000. *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* received many awards including the 1999 NCTE Award for Distinguished Research in the Teaching of English, and the Harvard University Press annual Virginia and Warren Stone Prize as the outstanding book on education and society.

Vivian Gussin Paley's other books include:

- A Child's Work: The Importance of Fantasy Play*
Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, Spring 2004
- In Mrs. Tully's Room: A Childcare Portrait*
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001
- White Teacher* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000
- The Kindness of Children*
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999
- Kwanzaa and Me: A Teacher's Story*
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995
- You Can't Say You Can't Play*
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992
- The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter:
The Uses of Storytelling in the Classroom*
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990
- Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays: Fantasy Play at Four*
Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988
- Wally's Stories: Conversations in the Kindergarten*
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987
- Mollie is Three: Growing Up in School*
Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986
- Boys and Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner*
Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984

Like all of Paley's books, *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* is engaging and intriguing. Paley records the conversations in her classroom, and so is able to authentically reproduce the children's voices in her writing. Using the present tense, her style is very immediate, with real dialogue that reveals a child's thinking. In recounting an incident, she doesn't labour the analysis, but often lets the unspoken message hang there, waiting to be understood by the reader. Her honesty is very refreshing; she openly shares her own misunderstandings, or earlier feelings about a book, from which she now gleams a different message. This is particularly striking on colour or identity issues, where the 'non-white' child picks up on a different message. Also surprising is the level of children's understanding of metaphor. For example, during a first reading of *Little Blue and Little Yellow* – a story about colour circles who are playmates – they hug each other and their colours blend and then their families no longer recognise them.

Reeny blurts out: 'That's a lie! A mummy and a daddy hasta remember their own child...and you can't neither change colours from hugging! Me and Cory hug and we don't change colours a bit!'

Reeny's interpretation so startles me that I rush to dilute her feelings. 'Maybe its just a story about painted circles, you know, if we mix blue and yellow we get green?'

Reeny shakes her head, wondering at my innocence. 'See, they is supposed to be people circles, else how do they hug?'

The way Lionni's books seem to speak directly to the children is rather extraordinary. His stories are readily understood in

metaphor and message. The power of the picturebook is clear. For example, discussing *Pezzettino* (who is just a small orange square in a land of towering creatures), Paley asks the children:

'Aren't they rather unfriendly to Pezzettino?... Couldn't they at least try to find out if he belongs to them in some way?'

The children see it differently.

'He does belong ... They're his grownups ... he can't do all that stuff 'cos he's just a little boy'.

Lionni understands perfectly how to portray the feelings of a small child in an adult world, and the child identifies easily while the adult struggles to comprehend.

Lionni's characters invade the children's own stories too, as we see when Reeny dictates:

'Once upon a time ... and Tico a

“Lionni's stories are readily understood in metaphor and message”

bird ... and Cornelius a crocodile ... and Ticey a girl ... they all live together in a house in the woods. So they all lived together and then a princess knocked on the door 'cos she was lost. 'Can I live here?' 'Sure, you can sleep with me 'cause we're really sisters!' And there was a rainbow.'

Paley often invites parents into the classroom to tell family stories, memories of when they were young, stories of grandparents or family traditions. The socio-cultural context is extended, as is the classroom culture, as part of her curriculum. Storytelling as an

art form is constantly redefined and reinvented, and always true to the community it represents.

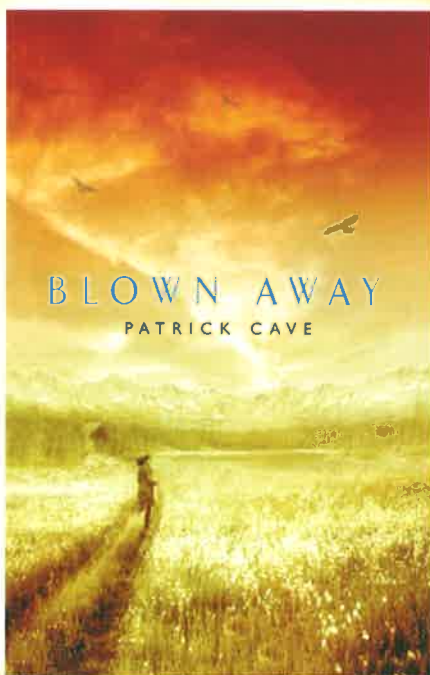
Having explored a number of Lionni heroes, Reeny raises the question of gender: 'So why is they all mostly boys?' Paley realises that the question of gender has not occurred to her, 'not one of the characteristics or issues we've discussed has been perceived as having anything to do with being a boy or a girl'. A visit to the library yields a girl character book: *Geraldine, the Music Mouse*. On reading this back in school again, Paley is puzzled:

'I can't figure out why the music comes from a piece of cheese...'

'Geraldine is dreaming,' the children explain.

Every teacher should read *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, not once but several times.

BLOWN AWAY BY PATRICK CAVE



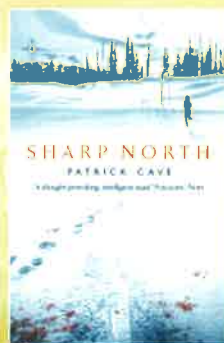
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Mary Byrne

LONDON is an amazingly resilient city. Deserted in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the 7th July, it was buzzing again by the following weekend with midnight Harry Potter parties happening at bookshops all over the city, presided over by booksellers who ranged from those who were hysterical with enthusiasm to the frankly jaded. As someone who works with children's books, and even has children, I felt morally obliged to offer the little darlings the opportunity to join in the madness. 'Can't we just buy it in the morning in Tesco's?' was their decidedly underwhelmed response. It was rather a guilty and furtive purchase, all the same, as I'd like to

“Harry Potter may be a bright star but he cannot be more loved than Charlie Bucket”

think I'd do the Right Thing and buy it from a proper independent bookseller who cannot afford to discount it and that I'd pay full price but, to my shame, I got it with the weekly milk and bread and cereal and paid £7.93, I think. Last time round my eldest son took to his room immediately, emerging pale and bleary having read the huge tome in only two days. This time round he hasn't even opened

the cover yet, more than 48 hours later. I suspect it will be read over the summer but not as greedily as the earlier ones. I do feel for the poor booksellers. In the week of counting down to HP publication date there was little point trying to talk to them about anything else. They all had a distracted wild-eyed look, generally sported their hair in a style best described as 'on end' and had a marked tendency to babble. They were all, whether of the enthusiastic or the jaded variety, looking forward to it being Sunday the 17th when it would be All Over. It is surely only a matter of time before Post Potter Trauma becomes a recognised syndrome and booksellers can at last get the therapy they deserve.

Harry Potter may be a bright star but he cannot be more loved than Charlie Bucket and, in what was an amazing weekend for children's books, the new film of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* had its UK premiere the very next day, on the 17th July. Leicester Square was full of Johnny Depp fans, many of them brandishing copies of the film tie-in books to be signed by the star as he made his way, wearing blue sunglasses, a beret (and flashing several gold teeth) along the red carpet, which was in this case actually bright green. Leicester Square looked like a scene from the film, tree trunks encased in purple and yellow and



red swirly sweets hanging from the branches and giant pink candy canes in the grass. Even the statue in the middle of the square looked like he was standing on melting chocolate. All the cast were in attendance, including the delightful and dapper Irish star, David Kelly, who played

Grandpa Joe. The star for me was Deep Roy who plays all the Oompa Loompas, all by himself. The Oompa Loompas doing synchronised swimming in the chocolate river, for example. How does he do that? Warner Bros organised a fabulous after-show party and

ferried guests to the riverside location by coach. Children's book launches are usually organised on a budget of about 50p so one could but marvel at the scale of this event. Hundreds of guests, magic champagne glasses that seemed to summon the waiters of their own accord even before they needed topping up, candy floss stands, chocolate fountains and a giant bouncy castle designed to look like the Great Glass Elevator were just a



“

Yellow and red
swirly sweeties
hanging from the
branches and giant
pink candy canes
in the grass”

few of the attractions. And brightly coloured candy everywhere! Johnny Depp and Tim Burton were protected from the hoi polloi by holing up in the VIP lounge but many other celebs were forced to mingle with us lesser mortals. We left eventually with armfuls of candy to take home and await our next dental check-up with trepidation. Willy Wonka doesn't even floss, you know!

How books are selected for and win prizes is a mysterious process and quite beyond my understanding. For example, how is it that Frank Cottrell Boyce was beaten for The Branford Boase Award by Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now* but he scooped the Carnegie for *Millions*, while *How I Live Now* didn't even feature on the shortlist? The Branford Boase is an award for a debut novel for a children's book which means that we could have Sir Paul McCartney in the running next year. It seems that everyone wants to write a children's book. Why is it that celebrities think it is such an easy thing to do? Congratulations also to Chris Riddell who was awarded his second Kate Greenaway Prize, this time for his illustrated *Jonathan Swift's Gulliver*. Next one up is the Guardian Prize which will be announced in early October. Meg Rosoff won last year so will be a judge this year. The Irish interest is Kate Thompson's *The New Policeman*, set in Kinvara,

which has struck a chord with many reviewers as an original and brilliant piece of writing. And then there's the Smarties and the Whitbread... The fun never stops!

Now that we've had Harry and Charlie it must be time to think about that other major end-of-year event. Most of the really big books will be published in a crowded September and October schedule, fighting for retail and review space. In between all the big blockbusting fantasies from Cornelia Funke and Jonathan Stroud and William Nicholson, and there are bound to be a few hidden gems. Watch out for *Chasing Vermeer*, for example, which mixes up art and maths and puzzles into a wonderful mystery adventure story set in the real world, and based on a real painting – and it works! The author Blue Balliet and illustrator Brett Helquist (acclaimed illustrator of the Lemony Snicket books) will be on tour from the US in September and are looking forward to visiting Dublin. Nancy Farmer, author of *The Sea of Trolls*, published by Simon & Schuster will also be on tour in September. David Almond will be touring to promote his new novel, *Clay*. There's a new Molly Moon coming from Georgia Byng and a sequel to *Wolf Brother* from Michelle Paver. There will be a new Jacqueline Wilson and a new Lauren Child, another Darren Shan and a new Lemony Snicket, and the tables in bookstores will be heaving with gift books but please do watch out for one very special one – *Ronald Dahl's Songs & Verse*. In this sumptuous book, Quentin Blake brings together 26 wonderful illustrators who each created a new piece of work for a piece of Dahl's writing. As the book's editor says 'This is a giftbook of such gorgeousness that no Christmas can be complete without it.' So order your copy now!

CBI Summer School 2005

continued from page 11

O'Brien Press), Emma Byrne (designer) and Corinna Askin and Alan Clarke (illustrators). The over-riding themes of an excellent presentation were the obvious enthusiasm of the team for the project, their close collaboration and the speed of production. I forgave them their 'love-in' because of the stunning quality of the product but where were the 103 people beginning with P?

The fifth of the six CBI/Bisto shortlisters of the weekend (Oisín McGann, Ré Ó Laighléis, Seamus Cashman and Kate MacLachlan) author and illustrator Oliver Jeffers told with great relish how he made his pitch to publishers and of his amazing success in being simultaneously published on both sides of the Atlantic. The different editorial treatment of *How to Catch a Star* in the UK and US was fascinating. (The US version was more explicit and mediated.) His informative and clear explanation of the process from pencil drawing to finished watercolour was an education.

The grand finale of a superb weekend was a conversation between Kate Thompson and Robert Dunbar. The intimacy of the format gave us a rare insight into Thompson's early years in Yorkshire, the child of radical academics. Thompson appears to develop an almost compulsive zeal in following her interests: horses, music, eastern philosophy, Irish myth and legend. The interests predate the books and when they arrive they are steeped in authenticity and glowing with confidence.

All in all a great weekend. Well done CBI.

Chatting with Jan Mark

Audrey Baker

JAN Mark is a warm, friendly and enthusiastic person. I found my 'interview' soon turned into a chat as her wonderful imagination and perception meant we ranged over all sorts of topics. What has always impressed me most about her work is the huge variety of ideas which she comes up with and her ability to write for all ages. I began by asking her if she was a disciplined writer.

Oh yes, it's a job, it's always been a job. That makes it sound very mechanical but it's not – it's how I work. At the moment, in the mornings, I'm doing research for the book I'm about to start writing. I'm doing the rewrites of the previous one in the afternoons and then in the evenings I read the proofs of the one before that!

When you come across an idea that you wish to explore, do you work round it or is it the inspiration for your characters?

It'll just be the place where I start. Sometimes it's so small I can't even remember what it was, just something that made me stop and think. One of the most interesting things

is that I don't plan in advance. I never know what the process of writing is going to throw up. The last book I wrote is science fiction and set on another planet, although you're not aware of this till the very end of the first third. As I wrote I was gradually conceiving this place and while seeing it I realised it didn't have a moon like ours and didn't have tides. It was a fishing community – the fish obviously weren't like ours but things that live in the sea. Then about 12,000 words into the first draft it occurred to me I hadn't mentioned

What happened subsequently wouldn't have happened if I'd planned ahead first

the birds. I sat and thought about this for a few minutes and then decided that I hadn't mentioned them because there weren't any and the entire plot went off at a completely different angle and it became so important that these people had no concept of flight! What happened subsequently

wouldn't have happened if I'd planned ahead first.

I think it must be quite scary not planning ahead.

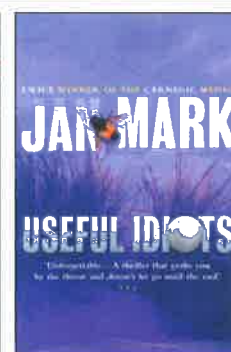
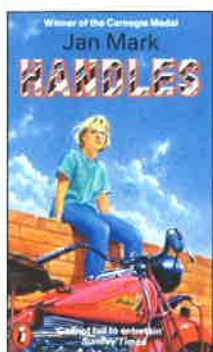
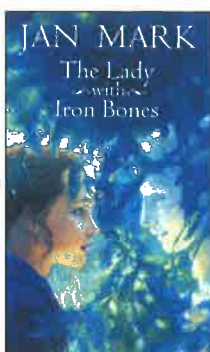
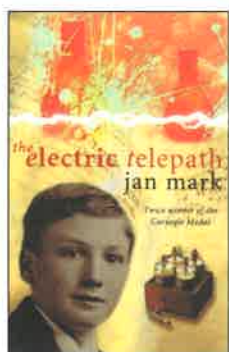
I am dependant on these characters talking and that's what I can do. I don't make up these conversations, I just write them down. I don't know how it works for me, it just does. So I really enjoy writing the first draft. I'm writing what I'm reading. I'm not doing any thinking. In schools I get the kids to do this. I tell them that thinking rots the brain! But only in my lessons, not in any other lesson.

On a negative note, have you ever had an idea that didn't work?

No, because it is never a fixed idea. It's simply where I start and what I have in my mind is developed into something entirely different.

How do you work with picturebooks?

Oh, I love doing them. This is



where my art school training comes in – not that I could illustrate them myself. I can draw but not illustrate. I've terrible trouble explaining this to children. I can draw *them* even though I've never seen them before. It'll look like them and that's what I was taught to do. I can't do what Tony Ross does or muck around. The point is I remember there's going to be pictures. They are not going to be anything to do with me. They are not my business.

If you don't work with the illustrator what happens if he or she produces a character you don't think you've written?

It's happened only once and it's a minor incident. Normally I am leaving clues in what I've written. Otherwise I'm writing only half the book and the other half is somebody else's. The one incident was when this guy who wanted to do the illustrations was really keen and obviously brilliant but, like so many people, he'd trouble with rats – Strat and Chatto are a rat and cat. He did the rat as a sort of wide boy, with corresponding shoes and a fancy suit. That was fine but it was the rat's face – he was Reggie Kray not Arthur Daly – it was as simple as that. It's a minor detail but Strat was a con artist, not a killer. But I loved the rest. Of course you never know what clues the artists will pick up from the text. Tony Ross is

“Of course you never know what clues the artists will pick up from the text. Tony Ross is a genius”

A brief biography...



JAN MARK was born in Welwyn, Hertsfordshire. In the late sixties she taught Art and then English in a secondary school in Gravesend, but since 1974 she has written full time. Her first book *Thunder and Lightning* won the Guardian/Penguin competition designed to discover new writers. The book went on to win the Carnegie Medal. In 1982 she worked for two years, as writer-in-residence, with graduate student teachers at the School of Education, Oxford Polytechnic. The name Jan Mark has come to be automatically associated with awards (including another Carnegie for *Handles*) and for work covering the whole age range, with her tough 'heavies', adult novels at one end and picturebooks at the other. She is admired for her brisk dialogue, which is character revealing and very funny, and her rare talent for storytelling. Like her work, she can 'be deadly serious but funny too'.

a genius. He did the book, *Carrot Tops and Cotton Tails*. I'd no idea what he was going to draw and he wasn't the designated artist – I never have one unless I've been asked to write for somebody – he'd drawn the rabbits as puritans and I wondered where he had got that from. Then I realised I'd used the word 'peaceable'. See the thought process? – peaceable, peaceable kingdom, Shakers, Quakers

As such a creative person do you find reviewing books a bit irksome?

Oh no, I love reviewing, I love finding books that are not getting any attention or publicity and spotting ones that might have been overlooked and then seeing them going on to become bestsellers and knowing that I spotted that one. A lovely book came out last year or the year before called *Keeper* by a guy called Mal Peet. He's one of a wonderful group of mature writers now – scriptwriters and those who have done other things before they turn their attention to writing for children and they are so good and sound and competent. Peet was one of the first and this book had a picture of a goalkeeper and one thought – oh, not another football book! Actually most of the book is an interview between a sports journalist and the keeper whose name is El Gato and who is the best footballer in South America. He has just brought home the World Cup and the whole point of the book is about the cup. It's there on the desk and Faustino, the journalist, asks El Gato to tell him something about his background. El Gato starts talking about his life and every now and again you come back to this cup. Half-way through you begin to think it's like the Holy Grail and then there is one of those epiphanies and you realise it is the Holy Grail and that is what the book is, a

search for the Holy Grail. If you don't know the Arthurian legend, well you've got El Gato's story, and if you do, well, you've got two fabulous stories. It went on and won an award. It's really done well and he's just published his second book and I like to think I helped a bit. There's some lovely stuff around and it doesn't always get any attention. Of course when I'm reviewing for the TES it's the other way round. I'm not looking for wonderful books, I'm warning teachers off lousy ones – ignore the hype, you haven't got money to waste on this stuff. I don't like giving bad reviews but there are something like 11,000 books published now in the UK – it was four and a half when I started.

The only concession I make for the younger children is to write about things that concern them

You write for all age groups. Does this cause any problems in deciding what ideas are suitable for a particular age?

The only concession I make for the younger children is to write about things that concern them. There's one called *Lady Long Legs* which is about children walking on particular tiles in the school corridor. It's based on a real school in Co. Durham where they had this beautifully designed tile floor but the under-floor heating made the tiles become unstuck (like most brilliant architectural ideas!) There were never the right colour tiles to stick back and the children had devised these paths which they were

following, some tiles were seen as bad luck ones. This is tremendously important to 6, 7, 8-year-olds and of no interest to 10-year-olds so the story grew out of the preoccupations of kids of that age. Otherwise, if I have a universal idea I forget about age range; all I assume is a full reader – a dedicated reader over 12 doesn't need special books – they are up to anything.

Yes, you like to challenge your readers and you often have an open ending to your novels.

I used to be very unpopular with that until people got used to it. I think it's partially the way I approach my characters. I'm intervening in somebody's life – it may be only two days, maybe months or a couple of years but presumably they will go on after I've finished with them as they were living before I got hold of them.

Useful Idiots has been described as a 'crossover' book which is a term I believe you dislike.

I think the divisions are overdone. Good children's books have always had adult readers; they don't need special adult covers. It's insane – if people are stupid enough to pay another two quid for a grown-up cover. The whole concept of crossover books is created. They only talk about those that cross up. The idea of young adult books really began in the 1960s when librarians, noticing that they were losing readers at 12 or 13, were finding adult fiction that might appeal to that age and put a sign on the shelf saying 'Young Adult'. Along comes a publisher and sees a previously unsuspected niche and a whole new genre is born. Before, it was always adult fiction crossing down, now it's always children's fiction crossing up. You never find an adult book commandeered by

The public don't rush out to buy books unless they're hyped

children now; probably *Adrian Mole* was the last one.

Has the recent boom in children's books been a good thing?

The public don't rush out to buy books unless they're hyped. Carnegie winners are ignored. A lot of good books go out of print because the publishers are pushing a book that they think will sell. Everyone is sacrificed for that one book to become a bestseller. The boom won't last. The booksellers keep very few titles and they are all selling the same ones. I don't enjoy bookshop shopping anymore because they are full of soft toys and copies of the book they think will sell and you can't browse, can't go looking for new and interesting things – they're not there. *The Bookseller* frequently inveighs against Ted Smart and the Book People but the will to sell is there and they make good selections. I get more royalties from them than anywhere else.

Most of your books contain humour which always appeals to the young reader.

It also makes me laugh. I don't do jokes, though the characters may tell them. That's what I really hate about fantasy. It's utterly humourless. You can be heroic or tragic or evil but you can never be ridiculous – yet that is the human condition, people are ridiculous. If you go back to the elements theory, you'd an imbalance and, as Ben Jonson saw, a sense of humour was a sense of incongruity. That's what

we're looking at, isn't it? The incongruity of human behaviour.

You have the rare experience of winning the Carnegie Medal for your first book and then you won it a second time.

Yes, it was a surprise – I thought it was something one worked up to. I wrote the book for a competition organised by Penguin through the *Guardian* newspaper. I've always read and always loved writing and I said to myself either I shall win this or I'm completely on the wrong track and if I can't do it I'm just kidding myself. And I did win. I wasn't surprised but on the other hand I wouldn't have

I never show my work to anyone. The editor is the first person to see it

been surprised if I hadn't. I really couldn't tell. It's the same now. After I've been 'in' the book for six, eight, 12 months I don't know if it's any good. I mean I have a good feel for it but I don't know whether it's working – I know so much more about it than what I've put on the page! I never show my work to anyone. The editor is the first person to see it.

The prize was actually to get published and the award was announced in 1975, then *Thunder and Lightning* was published in 1976 and the medal awarded the following year. *Handles* was the other winner in 1984.

Perhaps Jan Mark will win the medal again. Certainly this author of some 80 books must be included in any list of important children's writers. It was a privilege and pleasure to chat with her.

Jabberwock

Sprechen-Vous Ancient?

It's an exciting time in Gravyland as the committee for the National Award for a Really Readable Opus of Words come together to select the judges for the year. This is a very important job which entails reading lots and lots of books, some with many pages, so the committee members have to be very careful whom they choose.

'Settle down now, folks. It's that time again when we must do our duty in the name of Gravyland literature. Just look at the numbers opposite the submitted names of people nominated for judgeship. Who has a proposal?'

'Me. I propose number four.'

'Number four?' That person has been on the panel for the past few years.'

'Yes, but he knows stuff. And we won't have to explain the rules.'

'Grand. That's one out of the way. Next?'

'Number two, your committeeship. I'd like to propose number two'

'Number two. Hmm, let me see. Ah, a teacher. Always a safe bet. Teachers know stuff too. And they all speak our Ancient tongue. Now let me just lick my pencil. There, that's two out of the way. Next please.'

'Erm, I'd like to propose number one.'

'One, eh? Let me see. A professor, no less. Lots of letters after his name. It says here that he actually writes and gives lectures about books in places of high learning.'

'Yes, your committeeship. He's an authority on the subject. In fact probably the foremost authority on books in Gravyland.'

'That's most impressive. Let's have him then ...'

'Hear, hear.'

'Excuse me, Ms Proposer, but does he speak Ancient?'

'Erm. Just a couple o' words, like most of us. But he's such a wonderful authority, and there's only a handful of books submitted in Ancient. Why not get two special Ancient-speaking judges to judge books in Ancient?'

'No good. *All* judges must be fluent in Ancient. It says so in the rules. No place on the judging panel for non-fluent Ancient speakers.'

'Well that rules out number five. She knows every author from Aesop to Zephaniah and she broadcasts on live radio and gives important, classy talks about books.'

'But she doesn't speak Ancient?'

'Erm, just a couple o' words.'

'Let's just strike her out. It's getting late, folks. Are there any more teacher types on the list? A spare librarian? Grand, we'll just pen them in then.'

'Excuse me, your committeeship. But there's a Mister Owen Brynllandeilo, a Welshman living in West Gravyland who has submitted a book in his own language.'

'Well, if he's living in Gravyland then he must be accommodated. All of our incoming brethren who choose to live here must be embraced. So we must find a judge who speaks fluent Welsh as well as Ancient.'

'Hold on. There are books in Polish, Latvian, Estonian, Russian, Hungarian and other places beyond Borris-in-Ossory whose authors live here and have submitted them for the literary award.'

'Could we have some calm, please. I said QUIET! Now, let's begin again. Somebody order a pizza and strong coffee with those free little mint things. So, anyone know anyone who's fluent in Polish, Hungarian, Estonian, Latvian, Russian and Ancient?'

J

Linn Snámha Dé/God's Pond

Filíochta ó Scoil Naithí/Poetry from Scoil Naithí

Colette Nic Aodha agus Áine Ní Ghlinn

DUANAIRE NAITHÍ

Filíocht do pháistí scríofa ag páistí.

Díolaim filíochta le dánta ó dhaltaí Rang 4, 5, 6 i Scoil Naithí, Baile an tSaoir.

Eagarthóir: Áine Ní Ghlinn.

Foilsithe ag Coiscéim €5

Poetry for children
written by children.

An anthology of poetry by pupils from 4th, 5th
and 6th class in Scoil Naithí, Ballinteer, Dublin.

Edited by Áine Ní Ghlinn.

Published by Coiscéim €5



SNEACHTA

le hEva Ní Laoghaire

Tá an sneachta bán mar gur rith dia as dathanna
agus é ag déanamh bogha báistí.

Titeann sneachta as scamall mór bán.

Is é atá sa sneachta ná scamaill ag fáil bháis.

Rinne banríon na scamall an sneachta.

AN SPÉIR

le Niall Mac Dhonnagáin

Linn snámha Dé í an spéir

Le spéaclaí gréine deasa

Tá sé milliún, gaizilliún, blabailliún bliain d'aois

Ní bheidh sí riamh níos deise

Is iad na scamaill a chionníonn suas í

Na hanamacha go léir ag snámh

Ag déanamh báistí dúinn go léir

Is ag cur plandaí ag fás

Tá ciorcal an tsaoil agus
tuiscint na beatha le sonrú
sa dán álainn seo

TÁ na filí óga i nDuanair Naithí ag iarraidh an domhain a thuiscint. Cuireanna géircéimeanna móra an tsaoil isteach orthu, is léir, bíodh sé slad na nGiúdach, an tsunami mór san Áis nó daoine ag fáil bháis leis an ocras. Cuireann áilleacht a dtimpeallacht gliondar orthu chomh maith. Nach breá an íomhá atá sa dán 'Sneachta' le hEva Ní Laoghaire; 'Is é atá sa sneachta ná scamaill ag fáil bháis.'

Meafar deas eile sa dán 'An Spéir' le Niall Mac Dhonnagáin é 'Linn snámha Dé í an spéir.' Síntear an meafar céanna tríd an dán ar fad; 'na hanamacha go léir ag snámh, ag déanamh báistí dúinn go léir / Is ag cur plandaí ag fás.' Taitníonn an teanga liom sa dán seo. Chuir sé mé ag smaoineamh. Braithim grá ón dán. Grá Dé atá ann is dócha. Chuir sé mé ag smaoineamh siar ar na daoine a bhíodh grá agam dóibh atá anois ar Shlí na Fírinne agus samhlaím iad ag snámh-eitilt tríd na spéire 'ag cur plandaí ag fás,' ag tabhairt bláthanna, cruinn is ar uile dúinn. Na plandaí céanna a chionníonn beo muid. Tá ciorcal an tsaoil agus tuiscint na beatha le sonrú sa dán álainn seo. Cuireann na hanamacha ar ár gcumas plandaí deasa a bheith again is cuireann muidne na bláthanna céann ar uagheanna ár muintir.

The young poets of Duanair Naithí are attempting to get to grips with the world. Disasters affect them, be it past atrocities like the ethnic cleansing of the Jews during the Second World

War, the tsunami of last year or those dying of starvation. They also wonder at the beauty of our environment and this brings them joy. What a lovely image Eva Ní Laoghaire presents to us in her poem 'Snow'; Snow is clouds dying.

Another interesting metaphor is present in the poem 'Sky' by Niall Mac Dhonnagáin; 'The sky is God's pond'. This metaphor extends throughout the whole poem; 'all souls swimming, making rain for us / enabling plants to

The young poets of Duanair Naithí are attempting to get to grips with the world

grow'. I love the language in the poem, it set me thinking. I feel love emanating from the words of the poem; the love of God for all creatures. I started to remember those who I had loved, now souls in God's pool and I imagine them fly-swimming through the sky, their rain allowing plants grow; giving us flowers, trees and all types of flora. It is these plants whose oxygen keeps us breathing. The cycle of life and understanding of the world are portrayed in the imagery of this lovely poem. The souls enable plants to grow while we lay flowers at their earthly monuments.

– Colette Nic Aodha

Colette Nic Aodha was born and reared in Sruthar, Co. Mayo. She attended the National University of Ireland, Galway where she took a degree in Irish and history and subsequently trained as a teacher at post-primary level. She currently works in the Presentation College, Headford, Co. Galway, her old alma mater. Colette has published three volumes of poetry: *Baill Seirce* (BÁC: Coiscéim, 1998); *Faoi Chrann Cnó Capaill* (BÁC: Coiscéim, 2000); and *Gallúnach-ar-Rópa* (BÁC: Coiscéim, 2003).

Her poetry has been anthologised in such publications as *Field Day*, IV and V and in *The White Page / An Bhileog Bhán: Twentieth Century Irish Women Poets* (Galway: Salmon, 1999) edited by Joan McBreen. Colette's poetry was awarded a prize in the Dún Laoghaire Poetry Festival in 1993. She writes in English also and an English language collection is due for publication in 2006. Some of her short stories have been published in the literary magazines *Comhar* and *Feasta* and in the newspaper *Lá*. She lives in Galway with her three sons.

“Shíl mé go mbeadh sé go deas triail a bhaint as rud nua agus saothar na ndaltaí a cheiliúradh ar bhealach eile – le *fíorleabhar*”

Duanaire Naithí – Cnuasach filíochta ó pháistí. Filí óga idir deich mbliana d'aois agus trí bliana déag. Iad ag scríobh go huile is go hiomlán as Gaeilge.

Go bhfios dom ní raibh a leithéid ann riamh cheana.

D'eascair an duanaire seo as ceardlanna scríbhneoireachta le Ranganna 4, 5 agus 6 i Scoil Naithí i mBaile an tSaoir. Le dhá bhliain anuas táim i mbun scéimeanna cónaithe i ngaelscoileanna éagsúla i mBaile Átha Cliath – scéimeanna atá maoinithe ag Foras na Gaeilge.

De ghnáth ag deireadh scéime in aon scoil ar leith cuirim iris le chéile agus saothar gach uile dalta inti.

I mbliana, áfach, mar scríbhneoir agus mar thuismitheoir i Scoil Naithí shíl mé go mbeadh sé go deas triail a bhaint as rud nua agus saothar na ndaltaí a cheiliúradh ar bhealach eile – le *fíorleabhar*. Fíorleabhar ó fhíorfhóilsitheoir!

Tháispeáin mé cuid den saothar don bhfoilsitheoir Pádraig Ó Snodaigh (Coiscéim). Ní raibh orm dul ní ba fhaide. Bhí seisean an-tógtha leis an smaoineamh agus le caighdeán an tsaothair.

An dara céim ná an dearadh. Arís bhí an t-ádh linn. Tuismitheoir eile sa scoil é an dearthóir Paul Martin agus bhí seisean breá sásta teacht ar bord agus clúdach a dhéardh chomh maith le cuidiú

leis an leagan amach.

Faoin am sin bhí an creatlach againn – ach céard faoin lár? Céard faoi na dánta? Conas a fhéadfá rogha a dhéanamh? Bhí tuairim is ochtó páiste i gceist agus saothar d'ardchaighdeán ag gach uile duine acu. An plean a bhí againn ná an dán ab fhearr a roghnú ó gach duine acu.

Ceist eile ansin, áfach. Conas is féidir a rá go bhfuil dán amháin níos fearr ná dán eile? Ar ndóigh ní féidir! Ag deireadh an lae rogha an eagarthóra a bhí ann. Rogha pearsanta. Dánta a thaitin liomsa nó leis an bhfoilsitheoir ar chúiseanna éagsúla...

Dánta dúlra a bhí bunaithe ar cheisteanna agus freagraí. Haikúnna – iad spreagtha ag an tsunami, ag an mbás, ag timpistí agus tubaistí éagsúla. Dánta Nollag – idir throm agus éadrom. Dánta aonair agus dánta grúpa. Dánta spraoiúla agus dánta a chuirfeadh sceon ort. Ana-chuid acu a bhfuil sé deacair a chreidiúint go bhfuil a n-údair chomh hóg is atá.

Agus an rogha déanta bhí go leor eagarthóireachta le déanamh – ceacht sách mór do scríbhneoirí óga. Bhí ar gach file a chinntiú go raibh gach focal ceart agus go raibh an gramadach chomh maith is a fhéadfadh sí a bheith don aois-ghrúpa sin. In iris scoile is féidir glacadh le méid áirithe botúin ach ní fhéadfá glacadh leis sin i *leabhar*.

Rinne an t-eagarthóir moltaí ach ag deireadh an lae ba leis na filí na dánta. Iad siúd a rinne an cinneadh athruithe a dhéanamh

“Conas is féidir a rá go bhfuil dán amháin níos fearr ná dán eile?”



Some of the young poets at the launch of Duanaire Naithí. Also in the group are Deirdre Davitt (left) from Foras na Gaeilge who sponsored the launch and creative writing residencies, and Áine Ní Ghlinn. Photo: Colm Ó Tórna.

I wanted to celebrate the amazing standard of poetry from these young writers. I decided to do so with a book. *A real book*

nó rudaí a fhágáil mar a bhí. Má chiallaíonn sé sin go bhfuil focal anseo is ansiúd nach mbeadh sa chaighdeán oifigiúil is féidir an milleán a chur ar an eagarthóir!

Ag deireadh an lae, áfach, tá díolaim filíochta ann – díolaim ina bhfuil saothar ag ochtó file óg. Tá súil agam go leanfaidh ar a laghad beirt nó triúr acu seo ar aghaidh ag scríobh i ngaeilge sa todhchaí. Agus cá bhfios – b'fhéidir go mbeidh an chuid eile acu mar phobal léitheoireachta!

How old is the wind? Where do flowers go in winter? Thoughts on Christmas. A response to a stack of shoes from victims of the Holocaust...

These are just some of the subjects that inspired *Duanaire Naithí*.

Duanaire Naithí is a compilation of poems from creative writing residencies (residencies which were funded by Foras na Gaeilge) with classes 4, 5 and 6 in Scoil Naithí.

Usually at the end of a residency I produce a magazine which the

school photocopies for each student. However, as a parent in Scoil Naithí and having worked with the students in residencies over a number of years, I wanted to celebrate the amazing standard of poetry from these young writers. I decided to do so with a book. *A real book with a real designer and a real publisher!*

The first challenge was to get a publisher on board. This proved easier than expected. As soon as he saw a selection of poems from the children Pádraig Ó Snodaigh of Coiscéim was sold on the idea.

Designer Paul Martin – also a parent in Scoil Naithí – agreed to design the cover and look after the final layout.

Publisher and designer sorted – now to the content. A head count revealed that there were approximately 80 children involved over a two-year period. Some of these had been involved in another residency the previous year... So how to make the selection?

We went through the magazines from the two years. So many wonderful poems – long, short, funny, serious. Haiku. Rap. Poems based on soundtracks, on contrast, on question and answer sessions. We were well and truly spoilt for choice!

What makes one poem better than another? Nothing really except the reader's personal response. And that's what it came down to in the end. The 'best' poem from each and every child – a purely subjective choice made by the editor and publisher.

We chose poems we liked – simply because we liked them. We chose poems that were different. We threw in some group poems to add variety.

The selection made, there was still editing to be done. The students

Áine Ní Ghlinn is a poet, lecturer and children's writer. Her most recent collection of poetry is *Unshed Tears / Deora Nár Caoineadh* (Dedalus/Coiscéim). Her childrens' books include *Daifní Díneasár*, *Moncaí Dána*, *Lámhainní Glasa* (all three from The O'Brien Press), *Glantachán Earraigh*, *An Leaba Sciathánach* and *Céard tá sa Bhosca* (An Gúm) and *Cuairteoir* (Cois Life). *Fuadach* (Cois Life) will be published in August. Most recently, she was involved as a writer in residence in compiling an anthology of poetry written by children, *Duanaire Naithí*, published by Coiscéim.

With an MA in creative writing from Lancaster University she lectures part-time in DCU but spends most of her time working on creative writing projects in primary schools.

had to learn that there is quite a jump from an in-house school publication to a *real* book. Sometimes a word wasn't quite right. We looked at the alternatives. Sometimes the grammar didn't work. At times you could get away with a word or a phrase used in *Gaeilge Bhaile Átha Cliath*. Other times you couldn't and changes had to be made. Working individually with the students each poet had to make his or her own changes. The editor made recommendations but the poet had the final say.

What makes one poem better than another?

If this means the odd word or phrase that might stick in the throat of the expert, so be it. These are very young writers – the majority writing in Irish as their second language. Language issues will iron themselves out with time.

The main point – as far as this editor is concerned – is that they are writing creatively and doing so as *Gaeilge*!

These are the next generation of Irish language poets. The poets of the future. The readers of the future. And if *litríocht na Gaeilge* is to survive both are equally important.

– Áine Ní Ghlinn



Inis would like to thank and acknowledge the assistance of Jane O'Hanlon and Anna Boner of Poetry Ireland Education in the compilation of this section.

TRUTH AND JOKES AT THE MANSION HOUSE

The Emperor and Empress of Japan paid a visit to Ireland in May. Michael O'Brien of IBBY and The O'Brien Press, Siobhán Parkinson, late of this



The Empress of Japan on her visit to Dublin

parish, and Martin Waddell, winner of IBBY's Hans Christian Andersen award for a lifetime's achievement as a children's writer, were invited by the Lord Mayor of Dublin to meet them at a reception in the Mansion House. A few other less significant people (Seamus Heaney, Brendan Kennelly, Enya – second-rank people of that sort) were also invited. (In case any people from the Japanese Embassy are reading this, I should explain that the last sentence is an Irish idea of a joke. If you say you are very important and other people are not important, that means you know that actually the *other* people are far more important than you are. That's why it's funny. It is funny because it is not true. It is hard to explain.)

The Emperor and Empress were extremely charming and interesting to talk to. (In case any Japanese people are reading this, this is *not* a joke. It is true. That is why it is not a joke.) The Empress is a patron of IBBY and takes a keen interest in children's literature, and was full of questions about IBBY Ireland and *Bookbird* (a publication a bit like *Inis*, only more so). She has a noble record as a poet and translator of children's books (English/Japanese). Michael met her with the IBBY Ireland delegation when she spoke at the 50th Anniversary IBBY Congress in Basel.

Over the champagne Siobhán Parkinson and Martin Waddell had a small spat about an image they both thought would work in a story, and Seamus Heaney kindly adjudicated. It was a draw, I think. It will probably turn up in a Heaney poem before either Parkinson or Waddell gets to use it anyway. (That is an extremely complicated joke, but it is not the same kind of joke as before, because it is half true, and you have to guess which half. It's the way I tell them.)

Martin Waddell's foot was in a very fetching bandage. He fell into a grave he was digging or something. Something dramatic anyway. Perhaps he was pushed by an author who wanted to use an image he was appropriating. (That's a joke because it might be true but isn't.)

Everyone was most impressed by the warmth and sincerity with which they were greeted and the interest the Empress took in all the guests and her obvious love for Ireland and Irish culture. Amazingly, there were no

speeches, only 24 guests, and about 90 staff – Japanese diplomats, bodyguards and press, and lots of Irish protocol people from Foreign Affairs and Dublin City Council.

The event was quite moving, intense in a gentle way, and with a unique feeling of history and intimacy – every guest had an opportunity to speak to the Emperor and Empress. Dress was Western, manners Eastern, food Continental European / Asian with delicate little Japanese sweets.

It was an honour to meet with their Highnesses. And did you know they are the only Emperor and Empress in the world who both play music? We were empressed. (That is a really poor joke.)

The Empress has a noble record as a poet and translator of children's books

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iBBY IRELAND

announces the publication in September 2005 of

CROSS-CURRENTS

an IBBY Ireland guide to multicultural books for young people
edited by Liz Morris and Susanna Coghlan

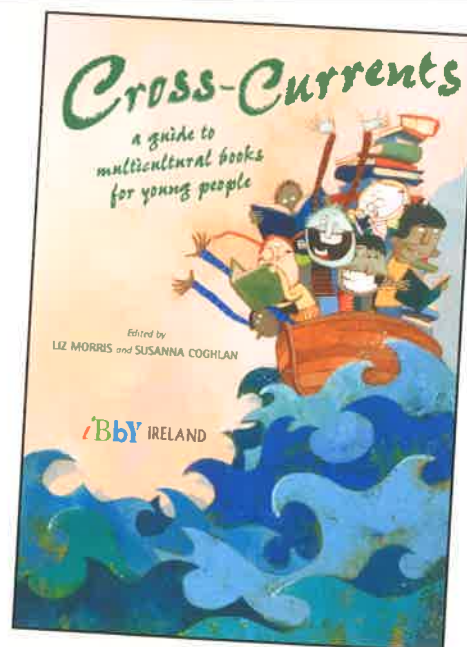
ISBN 0-9541352-1-0 €15/£10

- Over 170 reviews by Ireland's leading experts in the field of children's literature, covering Irish-language and dual-language books, fiction and non-fiction books for all ages, as well as folktales and myths from around the world.
- Articles on the use of books in schools in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, on books that are culturally appropriate – and inappropriate – for children in ethnic minorities in Ireland.
- Articles by practitioners in the field working with (and without) books in France, Thailand, Nicaragua, Alaska and many other places.

A companion volume to the highly acclaimed *Changing Faces—Changing Places* which was very successful in raising the profile of books for children relevant to a multicultural Ireland, CBI members can pre-order *Cross-Currents* by contacting

IBBY Ireland, c/o Ireland Literature Exchange/Idirmhalartán Litríocht Éireann,
25 Denzille Lane, Baile Átha Cliath 2. info@irelandliterature.com

For further information, see www.ibbyireland.ie





A typical week... in the life of a School Librarian

Beth Morrissey

ST ANDREW's College is home to approximately 850 secondary students and over 100 teaching and support staff, which means that on any given day several hundred of them may visit the library. In between working with these visitors and maintaining a collection of more than 10,000 print and electronic resources, the two librarians are lucky to come out alive, much less to follow a set schedule! When the bells ring in the corridors to signal a change of classes, in the library the bell often signals switching from researching databases to teaching information skills, or from cataloguing new books to setting up for a student art display. Perhaps more than any other area in the school, the library sees almost all aspects of secondary school life.

MONDAY

The library opens at 8 am and our regular early morning customers are waiting to begin the week. Almost as soon as the lights are turned on students have the computers buzzing. Most students use these early morning hours to finish homework or cram for exams, though a few use this time to browse the journals, select leisure reading or skim the daily paper.

When the school day begins the library empties for a few minutes and gives us time to check our email, straighten the shelves and

“The two librarians are lucky to come out alive, much less to follow a set schedule!”

return the books that have been left in the book drop outside. For the next nine periods, we supervise students using the library during their free periods and occasionally we close the library to accommodate teachers who bring their classes in to research. These periods allow us a little extra time to work on our impending book promotion.

When the final bell rings for the day, we breathe a sigh of relief that is cut short by the arrival of the entire girls hockey team who need somewhere to study before their practice. After an hour the girls leave and we are finally able to shelve all of the books that have been returned.

TUESDAY

Many mornings we arrive at the library to discover that one of our

“We breathe a sigh of relief that is cut short by the arrival of the entire girls hockey team who need somewhere to study before their practice”

orders has arrived, and this morning is one of the lucky ones! Three large boxes are waiting for us, each one crammed with books, DVDs and CDs. While keeping one eye on the students who use the library all day, we attempt to catalogue all of these new additions, ready them for the shelves, deliver them to teachers, coordinate a display, and draw up a recent acquisitions list to circulate to all staff. We work on these books all day (and hide away those that we want to take home), but stop with an hour left to go so that we can finish the day quietly, reviewing a few professional journals.

WEDNESDAY

Wednesdays may be shortened days for students and teachers, but the library still opens from 8 am to 6 pm just like any other weekday. Today the Classical Studies department has booked the library to display student projects. From 9 am to 1 pm the library is open to the entire school to view these works, and we still accept students eager to use the computers and hunt for books. Unfortunately we have to

turn away an English class that was hoping for an orientation and tips on selecting books for book reports. We reschedule this class, then when the final bell rings, we help the classical studies students find their work and take it home.

“The library rules include no bags, no eating and only one person per computer”

When most of the projects have been cleared, we let in the crowd that has been reaching a state of near riot in the corridor and watch in awe as the students race for their favourite seats. More than once we have to remind this crowd that the library rules include no bags, no eating and only one person per computer. After attending the weekly staff meeting, we notice the majority of students drifting home, and we use the rest of the afternoon to tackle the dreaded overdue letters. By the time six o'clock rolls around we are ready to tear our hair out in frustration over the students who have had books checked out from over a year ago!

THURSDAY

It almost seems our secret is out and the teachers know that the library is the place to be! We begin the day with our rescheduled English class, then welcome a history class for a double period which they use for research. After break, we have an hour before lunch which we spend evaluating online databases and debating if we should



subscribe. During lunch we welcome a student group that is desperate for a quiet place to

“We have had to steer students away from Stephen King, explaining that if they like to be frightened they might try an RL Stine first”

hold a meeting. The afternoon we spend teaching two classes how to evaluate electronic resources, and giving one student a mock exam. After school we notice three teachers giving grinds, and two more using the library to catch up on marking. Thankfully they all stop to chat before they go, giving us a few nice breaks from the budget details we were going over.

FRIDAY

Like anyone else, we look on Fridays with great fondness. Often we save up a few treats for Fridays, particularly the book ordering. Many Friday mornings we spend with our heads in book catalogues, or online reading reviews. When we whittle down our huge list of 'wants' to a more acceptably sized list of 'needs', we type our order into Heritage, our electronic library system, and print it off to be sent to our suppliers. Sometimes we will later find out that the books we want are no longer in print, a hazard that crops up when we must replace books that have been so well-loved that they are now in tatters! Other times we will find out that we have been overzealous and ordered books that have not yet been published. Thankfully we use wonderful suppliers who will always let us know quickly if there are problems with our orders, or even if we have inadvertently ordered a hardcover book when we clearly would prefer a paperback (speaking price-wise, of course).

Friday afternoons is one time that we do have a standing appointment in the library. At 2:30 pm exactly, over 30 sixth class students show up from the primary school ready to cause a commotion. We welcome these students every week because we realise that they are at a precarious reading age, one that may be too old for the primary library but too young for many of the books in our secondary library.

To combat this, we keep a close eye on what they attempt to check out. More than once we have had to steer students away from Stephen King, explaining that if they like to be frightened they might try an RL Stine first. A lot of these students also run to our Quick Reads Rack, a special collection we have put together to offer readers a one-stop shop for books designed with reading levels in mind. Often these books will be abridged versions of classics or bestsellers, and will include pictures and other illustrations.

After the havoc of the P6s has died down, we usually spend the rest of the afternoon returning and reshelving the books they have brought back to us, and doing a general tidy up to get ready for the next week. We often finish this by the end of the school day because the last period on a Friday is a time slot highly coveted by teachers. While they bring their classes in to use our resources, we have a bit of time to get ourselves in order.

When the last bell rings on a Friday, we are often uncertain of how many students we will have for our after-school hours. Some Fridays we will have virtually no students, while other days we may be packed to capacity with students attempting to get their homework finished early. Either way, we often use these last two hours to settle in and catch up on our own reading, as it is very important for us to be up-to-date on what the students are reading, and what we should recommend when they come to us for suggestions.

At 6 pm, when the last of the students are packing up and we are setting up the library for the next week, the hush that falls is perhaps the first truly silent time

“Controlled chaos reigns and we librarians are simply the ringleaders!”

the library has witnessed all week. Don't be fooled by the stereotype of the library as a silent oasis and librarians as the protectors of the peace. In a school library, controlled chaos reigns and we librarians are simply the ringleaders!

NEWS

CICE Conference 2005

'Past and Present: what children and young adults read' is the title of a conference at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines, Dublin on 11th and 12th November organised by The Reading Centre @ CICE. The speakers are Susan Parkes, John Coolahan, Alan Titley and Kimberley Reynolds, and the conference will include a tour of The Plunkett Museum of Irish Education on the College campus. Further details and booking form from info@cice.ie.



The SLA School Librarian of the Year Award

This new award was started by the School Library Association in 2004 in recognition of the lack of awareness of the crucial role that school librarians play in raising attainment, creating readers and developing skills for life. Effective school librarians support teaching and learning in their schools enabling students and staff alike.

Congratulations to Jane O'Loughlin, librarian at Coláiste Cathail Naofa, Dungarvan who was one of five librarians to be shortlisted for this award.

Chief executive Kathy Lemaire explains 'School librarians are essential to the education process, but as they are solitary workers they are sometimes undervalued. We wanted to celebrate the diversity of good practice in the UK and Ireland, and we're delighted with the success of the award this year.'

The School Library Association (SLA) was started in 1937 to support the development of and advocacy for school libraries and librarians. More information at www.SLA.org.uk

The SLA School Librarian of the Year Award was announced last Spring. More Information on the honour list can be found at

<http://www.sla.org.uk/blog/2005/03/honour-list-for-school-librarian-of.html>

or email info@SLA.org.uk

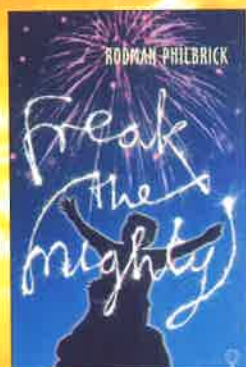
FIRE PONY

RODMAN PHILBRICK

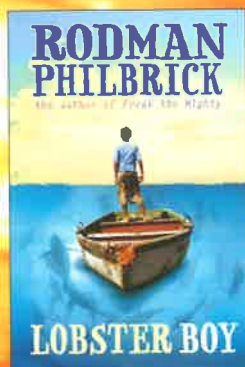
A story of horse-whisperers and heroes
from the author of *Freak the Mighty* and *Lobster Boy*

"Unputdownable" *The Scotsman* on *Lobster Boy*

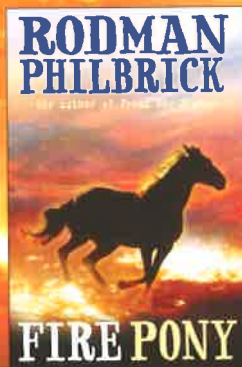
"A small classic, funny-sad,
page-turning and memorable." *The Sunday Times* on *Freak the Mighty*



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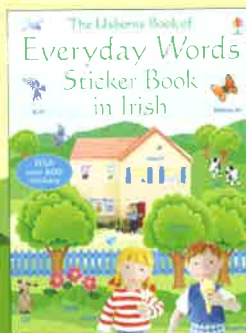
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The books that brought me here... 'A monstrous appetite'

Oisín McGann

IMAGINE my delight when, at my own birth, I was fortunate to find myself in the custody of parents who knew all the perfect triggers for stimulating a child's imagination. Picturebooks were first, of course; I was spoon-fed a daily diet of visual treats. Stories or nursery rhymes, it didn't matter; with a monstrous appetite for entertainment, my imagination demanded its feed and was not easily sated. Dr Seuss was a big favourite, our hardback edition of *There's a Wocket in My Pocket* worn to tatters as my mother read it *ad nauseam* first to me, and then later to my brothers and sisters (she can still recite it from memory).

The same fate awaited all our Richard Scarry books, their educational content cleverly hidden behind sincerely playful characters and wonderful machines; they were books that could tell stories with their pictures alone. We loved them to destruction.

I was spoon-fed a daily diet of visual treats

Books such as these made such an impression on my tender mind that at the age of three, I announced to my parents that I was going to be an artist. They endeavoured to offer as much support as possible in the furthering of my career, and my feverish

hunger for illustrated books became immense as they produced one marvel after another. It was in my first years of school that I became inculcated with the fundamentalist certainty that *books had to have pictures*, a belief that with few exceptions, I have never shed.

The Richard Scarry books were only one set of tales to earn my love through the use of animals. Any story told with animals as the protagonists won my approval as I grew more confident in my reading; all of the classic fairytales of course, most often read from the admirably tough Ladybird books (back when they still represented the finest quality in children's publishing), Beatrix Potter's lovingly illustrated yarns, *The Matchless Mice* (before the sequels), John Gray's *The Day the Monster Came*, or picturebooks from animated films like *The Jungle Book* or *The Aristocats*.

I varied between shorter and wacky, and longer, more absorbing stories as my reading became more confident. I followed the eccentric adventures of *Professor Branestawm*, and had a fascination for absurd machines by the likes of W Heath Robinson; bizarre devices that were as imaginative as they were impractical. And all the more entertaining if they were rampaging out of control in an unsuspecting world.

As I moved up through second



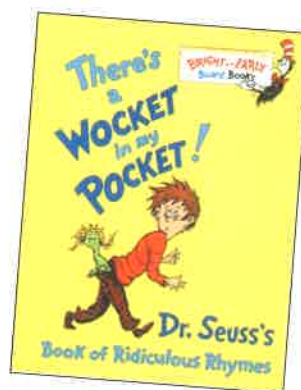
Oisín, aged 4

and third class, I began choosing my own books wherever I could get them. Jumble sales provided some interesting morsels for a growing boy with a hungry imagination to feed. My boyish tastes were starting

to assert themselves; I remember a lot of second-hand comics annuals – *Dan Dare*, *Eagle*, *Tarzan*, *Batman and Robin*, *Superman*; near-indestructible books that survived for years under beds and in toy boxes.

Making brief comebacks, I delighted in rediscovering their

Any story told with animals as the protagonists won my approval

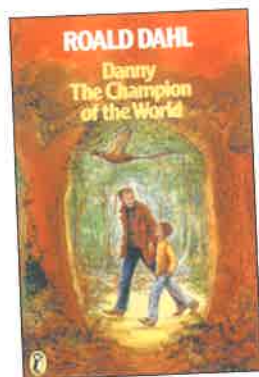


formulaic stories and their polished, American, graphic illustration styles, lasting so well on their yellowing pages.

But I had also discovered Roald Dahl, and there is nothing that can be said about him that has not already been said many, many times. Reading everything of his that I could find, I was left puzzled that all young children's books weren't written this way, and that other writers didn't write for every age group as he did. Like every child, I liked clear, descriptive illustration, and while I liked Quentin Blake's quirky style, there were times when I found it irritatingly messy and short on backgrounds and detail. It's something I notice about many modern books; that the illustration is executed in expressionistic, or avant-garde styles to meet adult tastes, rather than children's. But Dahl's storytelling style left an indelible impression on my own writing as it moved beyond its first faltering steps.

Most of the time, though, I paid little attention to the creators of my favourite books – everything I needed to know about them was in their work. This attitude changed little as I grew up; I

Dahl's storytelling style left an indelible impression on my own writing



didn't read interviews or biographies, or collect a single autograph. I still have little interest in meeting my favourite writers and illustrators; possibly because they might interfere with my perception of their work. I feel the same now, about tainting the views of people who read my own work.

Mystery was the next dish on my imagination's menu; I devoured *The Hardy Boys* and *The Three Investigators*, or the hardback collections of 'adventure stories for boys'. Fiction or non-fiction, these were rip-roaring yarns of soldiers, spies, detectives and criminals in short story form, or as snippets from longer novels. Anything with a good pace, an engaging plot and storylines set anywhere but where I was living; these offered a near-constant escape from school and later, the onset of hormonal chaos that my early teens would trigger.

Visual input remained as important as the stories themselves, and as I settled into reading novels, I was also nosing into my father's

bound collections of *Andy Capp* (sloth, alcoholism and domestic violence will never be that funny again), and the cartoons of Carl Giles. Long before I understood the political context of his work, Giles impressed me with his irreverent family of misfits, his cracking one-liners and his mastery of every aspect of drawing, from caricatures to vehicles. I would browse through these books with a glass of milk, and sometimes a slice of marzipan, filched from my mother's baking cupboard.

The Chronicles of Narnia started casting their magic when I was about 8 years old, and I remember the wonderfully bittersweet moment when I finished *The Last Battle* at about three in the morning, wallowing in the final glory of it, but despondent that the Narnia stories were over forever.

I think it was probably around this stage when I began dreaming of some day doing for other readers what these writers were doing for me.

My insistence on seeing the world through the eyes of animals continued, too; held in rapture by the likes of *Watership Down*, *The Wind in the Willows* and later, *The Plague Dogs*. But by now, my interests were becoming more analytical. I had my heart set on being a zoologist; based purely on the fact that my parents had scientific backgrounds, so it followed that I should be a scientist too. And the only science that really appealed was one that offered the prospect of tracking down rare creatures like the colobus monkey (no developed thumbs), or the okapi (looks like a cross between a short-necked giraffe and a zebra). Non-fiction books on animals started taking up more and more of my shelf space, particularly



Holiday reading: Oisín (far right), aged 9

anything well illustrated and descriptive. And if they said animals were dangerous, nasty or outlandish, all the better.

Unwilling to give up my taste for a good story, however, I found a perfect compromise in Hal and Roger Hunt's exploits in Willard Price's excellently informative Adventure series, starting with *Whale Adventure*, moving on to *Gorilla Adventure*, *Lion Adventure* and ... well, you get the idea. There were a lot of them, all with equally unimaginative titles, and like Frank and Joe Hardy and their detective contemporaries, they had years of escapades *without ever getting any older*. And I loved them all.

Having already been entranced by *The Hobbit*, I now tackled *Lord of the Rings*. As with Dahl, I would only be repeating what so many have already said about Tolkien, but I remain Lord-of-the-Ringed to this day.

Having already been entranced by *The Hobbit*, I now tackled *Lord of the Rings*

Together, my reading, writing and illustration were reaching unhealthy levels of obsession by fifth and sixth class. Despite being a relatively good boy, I was at one point sentenced to detention for a whole week – the crime itself has faded from memory, but given that most of the boys in my class suffered the same punishment, it must surely have been some prepubescent venture on the scale of *The Great Escape*. When my parents descended on the school to remonstrate about the harsh-



Oisín McGann

Born in Dublin, Oisín McGann spent his childhood there and in Drogheda, Co. Louth. He studied at Dún Laoghaire School of Art and Design, and went on to work in illustration, design and film animation, later moving to London to work as an art director and copywriter in advertising.

He now lives in Drogheda and works as a freelance illustrator and artist. He is the author of two novels: *The Gods and their Machines* (winner of a Bisto Merit Award 2004–5) and *The Harvest Tide Project*, published by The O'Brien Press, as well two books for young children for the O'Brien Flyer Series: *Mad Grandad's Flying Saucer* and *Mad Grandad's Robot Garden*. He is currently working on a number of projects, including *Mad Grandad and the Mutant River*, and *Mad Grandad and the Kleptoos*, as well as *Under Fragile Stone*, the sequel to *The Harvest Tide Project* – all due out in the autumn.



ness of the sentence, my teachers responded by saying 'he hardly goes out *anyway*'.

I was taking comics more seriously too. *Battle* was my staple read, on order at the newsagent next to my school. It was a varying collection of Second World War adventures – until the introduction of the *Action Force* supplement – its internal pages still printed largely in one or two colours on old-fashioned newsprint. *Johnny Red* was one of the best series, but the saga that left the most permanent mark was *Charley's War*, written by Pat Mills and illustrated by Joe Colquhoun (though, believe it or not, I didn't know their names for years). Unlike so many of these British WWII series, it was

realistic, human, painstakingly researched and packed



with equal parts action and down-to-earth drama. Colquhoun's

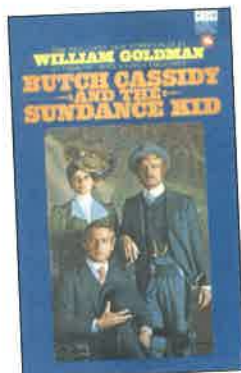
art was perfect, just perfect, and for years to come remained the standard by which I judged all other black and white comic art.

But I still loved books, and this was the best time in any child's life for reading; where you are able for more mature novels, but are still unhampered by the cynicism of adulthood. My appetites varied wildly, from Ted Hughes' beautifully simple *The Iron Man* (now skilfully reworked in the animated film *The Iron Giant*) to the dark and gritty *The Silver*

“I would never again experience the magic of reading with the innocence and open mind of a child”

Sword. From modern literature like *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach, to battered, out-of-print relics like *Masterman Ready*, found on a dusty shelf at home among my parents' mass of books.

My passion for the big screen was also moulding my tastes; I sought out books of films – adapted either to or from – and



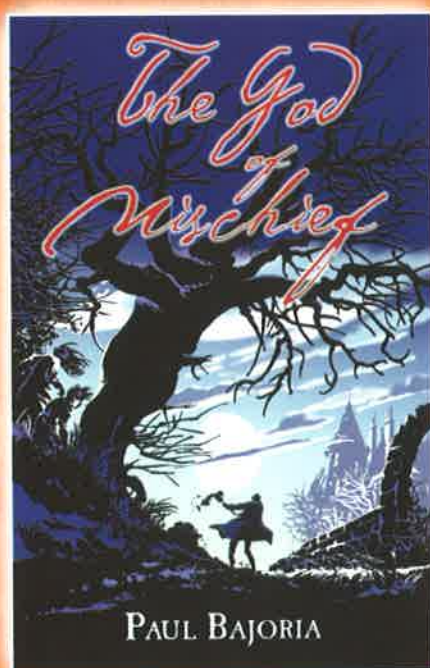
sometimes I was introduced to old treasures I had missed on my earlier trawls through the shelves, like *Dracula* or *Tarzan*. My mind produced all the images I needed for *Gremlins*, *The Neverending Story*, and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (tantalisingly printed as the original screenplay), but I particularly coveted those with the eight pages of full colour stills bound into the centres.

I had always been plied with the classics as I grew up, like the obligatory *Treasure Island*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Moby Dick*. Jules Verne, though, had a special place in my heart, and not just for well-known books like *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, and *Around the World in Eighty Days*. There were also for lesser-known gems like *From the Earth to the Moon* (with wonderful

chapter titles such as 'The Permissive Limits of Ignorance and Belief in the United States') and *Clipper of the Clouds*, where he imagined the forerunners of the helicopter and the space station. I still marvel at his foresight and that of HG Wells; they taught me that if writers are to foretell the path of society in the future, they have to look beyond the predictions of today's science and politics.

But by secondary school, my tastes were maturing towards adulthood, and while I continued to dip into children's books out of a sheer love of the storytelling, the imagination and imagery, I would never again experience the magic of reading with the innocence and open mind of a child. In gaining the complex palate and motives of adulthood, I have lost that ability to give myself entirely to a story... and I miss it dearly.

The God of Mischief by Paul Bajoria



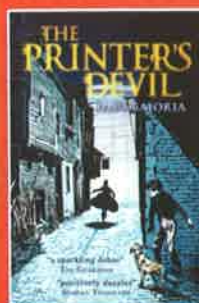
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Children's Book Festival 2005

Mags Walsh

ON October 5th the annual Children's Book Festival will burst into life.

Libraries, schools, arts centres and bookshops will all be crammed with festival excitement.

EVENTS

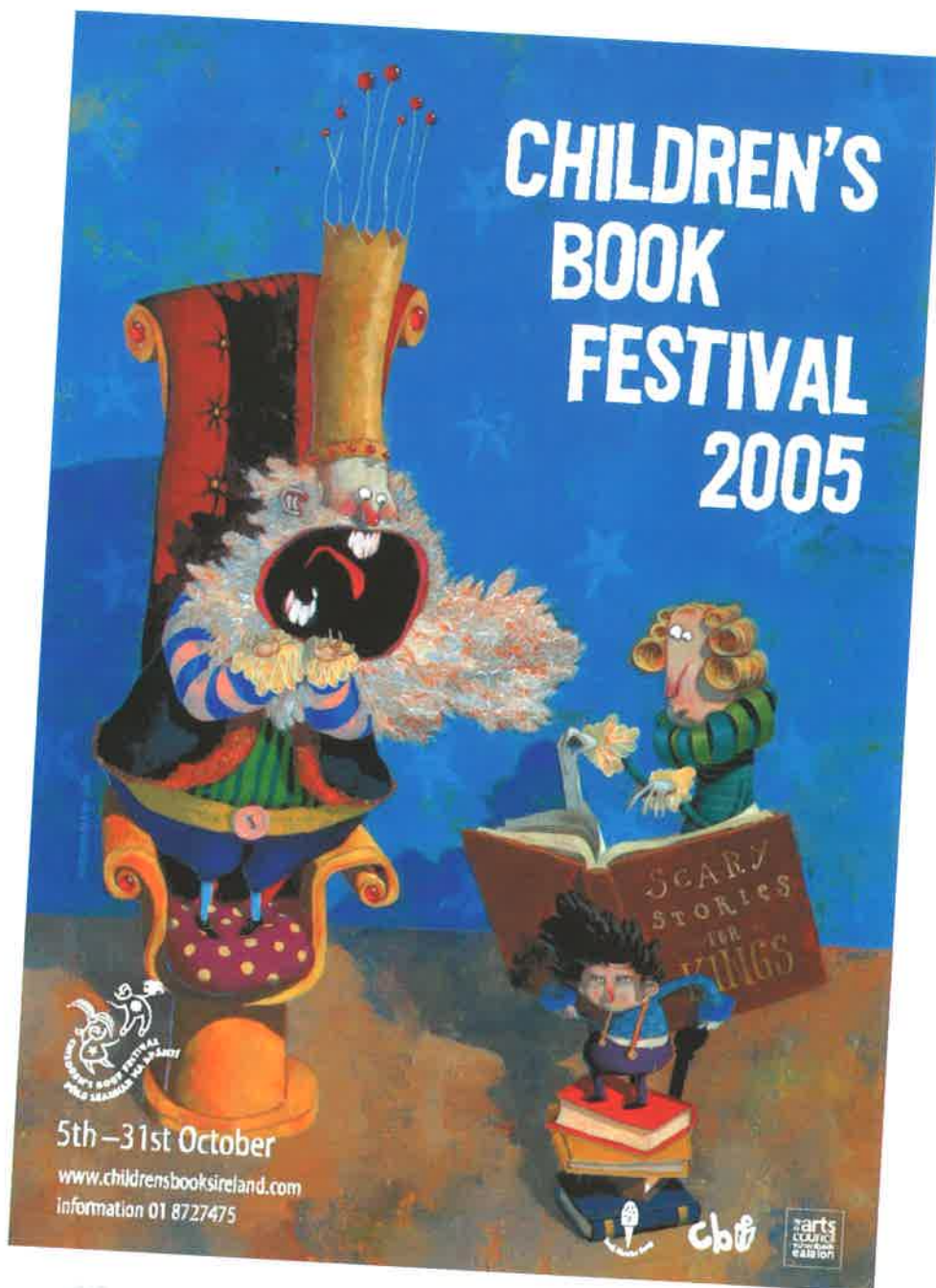
It's amazing just how many events happen in so many places during the Children's Book Festival. From Bantry to Buncrana there are lots of different types of events in libraries, bookshops and arts centres. For full details of all events, pick up a copy of our *Event Guide* or check out our website –

www.childrensbooksireland.com

Here's a sneak preview of who'll be there: Oisín McGann, Olwyn Whelan, Mary Arrigan, Joan O'Neill, Cathy Hopkins, Philip Ardagh, and fingers crossed, Carnegie Medal winner Frank Cottrell Boyce will be able to join us. And remember all events are FREE!

BOOK FEST

This year's *Book Fest*, our annual Recommended Reading Guide is our most in-depth yet! There are 64 pages crammed with longer reviews of books for everyone from babies right up to teenagers. Our expert panel of reviewers have gone through the books of 2004–5 to highlight for you the best of what's on offer. It's a great resource for teachers, parents, librarians and booksellers.



“ And remember
all events
are FREE! ”

This year also includes helpful tips on how to spot a good book for whatever age the reader is and you'll be able to recognise Irish publishers, illustrators and writers with our new 'green theme' rating.



Ariel Lillick, stilt-walker, gets an enthusiastic response at the Children's Book Festival.



Frank Cottrell Boyce and Celia Rees signing books for fans.

Book Fest will be available in your local library and participating bookshops from September 19th.

SCHOOL PACKS

Festival packs are stuffed with copies of *Book Fest*, *Event Guide*, festival posters, bookmarks, pencils, and class activities. They are available to schools for a nominal fee. It's a great way to get involved in the festival. For more information, contact the Festival Office on 01 872 7475, or email james@childrensbooksireland.com

we also want to find out who your favourite author is

AUTHOR POLL

During the festival we also want to find out who your favourite author is. In 2004 Jacqueline Wilson came out on top, outdoing, JK Rowling,

Roald Dahl, Meg Cabot, JRR Tolkien. Have your say either in your local library or online – www.childrensbooksireland.com

Polls open on October 5th.

DESIGN A BOOKMARK

One element of the festival is already up and running in many library authorities – The Design-a-Bookmark Competition. Two lucky young artists will get the chance to design the festival

bookmarks for 2006. This year there are two categories: one for 10 years and younger and one for 11 years and older. This year's bookmark design is by Simon Mernagh from Dundalk. You can see this brilliant design on our 75,000 bookmarks for this year's festival.

Book Fest will be available in your local library and participating bookshops from September 19th

Full details of how to enter are available in your local library.

If you would like any further details about any of the Festival please contact:

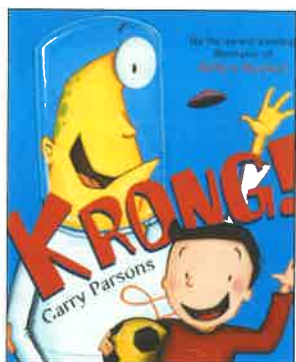
James Curtain in the CBI Office, Tel 01 872 74 75 or email james@childrensbooksireland.com

The Children's Book Festival is presented by Children's Books Ireland, in association with The Youth Libraries Group. We gratefully acknowledge our supporters and friends: Mentor Books, ColourBooks Ltd, Glennon Print, An Post, MS READaTHON, Bord na Leabhar Gaeilge, and Eason and Sons Ltd.

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Garry Parsons
Krong!

The Bodley Head 2005 32pp (hbk) £10.99 0370328485



A boy is kicking a football round the garden with his dog when a spacecraft lands and out emerges a real-life alien with his blue alien dog. 'Hello!' says Carl, to which the alien replies 'Krong!'; 'Woof!' says Carl's dog and 'Zoff!' barks the space mutt. Several

attempts by Carl to communicate with the alien ensue, on the advice of his parents – who are busy doing weekend chores in the house – through French, Spanish and Japanese, all to no avail.

The illustrations in this large format picturebook are bright and animated, capturing wonderfully the fast-paced excitement that children feel when people come to visit, especially when the visitors are bearing gifts. Carl's efforts to communicate with the alien is a good introduction for young children to the notion of different languages, while a twist at the end of the tale – where it turns out that Carl's parents are aliens themselves, and the strange visitor is Uncle Phil from Planet Noo – celebrates the beauty and equality of difference in an interesting and surprising way.

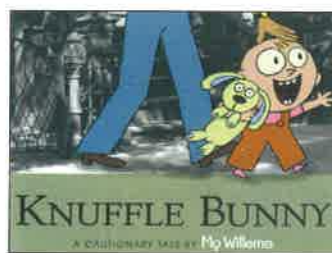
My two boys loved *Krong!*, though I found both the images and text a touch repetitive, and I doubt that the 4s+ would pay it much attention after a couple of reads. At the same time its simple, repetitive nature make this book ideal for reading to babies and young

children simultaneously – worth its weight in gold for one adult trying to get children of different developmental stages to bed.

Adrienne Murphy

Mo Willems
Knuffle Bunny

Walker Books 2005 32pp (pbk) £6.99 1844280594



At first glance I wasn't sure if this book would appeal to me. The format is landscape in the style of a light coffee-table book. The illustrations are bright verging on garish and set

on a background of black and white photographs with a matt olive-green border. But after a quick flick through the pages, I realised that Mo Willems's book has a unique style that draws you in. The clever use of photos as a backdrop seems to add a more realistic element to the story. His illustrations are simple yet lively with perfect expressions to display particular emotions. This cautionary tale tells the story of a little girl's morning with her father, 'Not very long ago, before she could even speak words, Trixie went on an errand with her daddy...' A trip to the Laundromat is so exciting for Trixie that she leaves her beloved toy Knuffle Bunny behind. Anyone who has ever been baffled by the insistent and sincere babble of a young child will find the following pages hilarious. An exasperated Trixie tries her best to alert her clueless daddy about Knuffle Bunny: she babbles, bawls and eventually goes 'boneless'. 'As soon as Trixie's mummy opened the door, she asked, "Where's Knuffle Bunny?"'. After a frantic dash and thorough search a wet and very clean rabbit is pulled out of a washing machine causing Trixie to jump in the air and cry 'Knuffle Bunny!!!' 'And those were the first words Trixie ever said.' This story has become a favourite in our house – though soft toys are still brought out to help with errands.

Síne Quinn

Paul Bright (Matt Buckingham illus)

Nobody Laughs at a Lion!

Little Tiger Press 2005 28pp (hbk) £10.99 1845061055

Pa Lion is a proud, handsome and boastful lion who enjoys watching over his 'Kingdom'. His arrogant nature is challenged by cheeky Ma Lion. 'You can see why I'm King of the Jungle,' he said. 'It's because I'm the best.' 'Do stop boasting,' said Ma Lion. 'And if you are the best, what are you best at?' After many attempts at various activities: running, climbing, creeping and barging, he realises that the other animals in the jungle are faster, stronger and more agile. Not only do the other animals beat him each time they also snigger at him. Pa Lion's mood changes from arrogance to disappointment, and annoyance to sheer anger. Though Ma Lion 'helpfully' points out that he's very good at sleeping, Pa Lion's fury eventually makes him 'ROAR!' causing the rest of the jungle to go deathly quiet. 'And Pa Lion was happy at last... because NOBODY laughs at a lion!' This is an amusing and charming story. Even though Pa Lion is boastful and grumpy there's an endearing aspect to his character. The illustrations are bright and clear water-colours, which compliment the funny tale. *Nobody Laughs at a Lion!* is a great book to introduce young children to many different animals, and is a perfect bedtime story for toddlers.

Síne Quinn

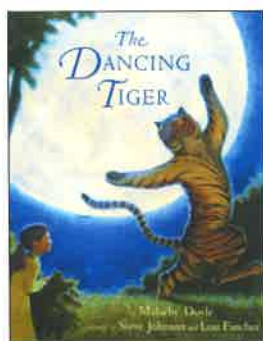


Malachy Doyle

(Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher illus)

The Dancing Tiger

Simon and Schuster 2005 28pp (hbk) £10.99 0689873093



There's a quiet, gentle tiger
In the woods below the hill
And he dances on his tiptoes,
When the world is dreaming, still.

On nights when the full moon
shines, the shy tiger dances
joyously in the wood, his only
fear that of detection. But the
little girl who finds him can

keep a secret and together they dance by the light of the moon. Through spring, summer, autumn and winter they dance, their adventures recounted in a lyrical, verse text that brings the rhythm of their dance

to life. With a palette of rich midnight blues, eerie moonlit greys and a glowing, harvest moon orange, the sumptuous illustrations draw the reader into a secret, timeless world. A surprising final twist brings them back to the present. The engaging, lively text is a pleasure to read aloud. Suitable for ages 2-5.

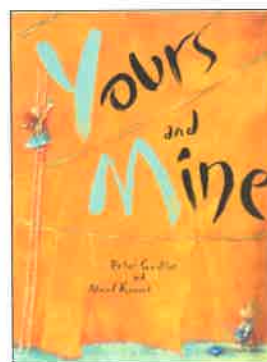
Kate Agnew

Peter Geißler (Almud Kunert illus)

(Anthea Bell trans)

Yours and Mine

Frances Lincoln 2005 32pp (hbk) £10.99 1845073231



The blurb accompanying this lavishly produced picture-book tells the reader that this story is a 'fantastical flight of fancy' where two children compare their secret friends, but I am sorry to say that, despite the glowing CVs of writer, illustrator and translator, it just does not work. No

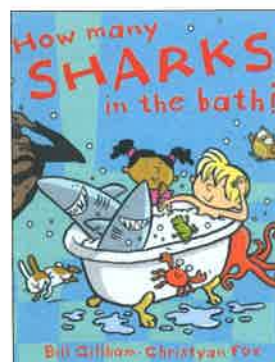
one that I have shown it to, adult or child, 'got' it. It strikes me that the text fails on two counts. Writing that I imagine is intended as subtle is merely obscure and comes across as incoherent and pretentious, and the central idea has simply not been sufficiently articulated. The colourful illustrations are initially attractive but as with the text they have an unsettling nightmarish quality. As I said above I am sorry to say this, as books translated into English are few and far between and should be welcomed but I can't recommend this one.

Lucinda Jacob

Bill Gillham and Christyan Fox

How Many Sharks in the bath

Frances Lincoln 2005 24pp (hbk) £9.99 184507288X



This is a 'laugh and learn' counting book essentially for use, one to one, with a toddler. The child characters invite the reader to 'Count the animals and put your finger on the number'. The illustrations are 'banded' on the left-hand side with questions such as 'How many

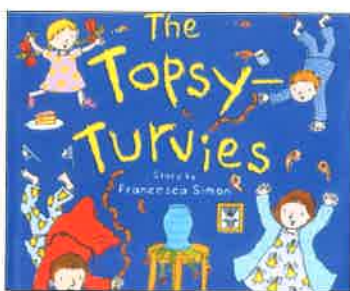
octopuses juggling oranges?' and on the right-hand side the numbers are presented in words and figures, 0-10. The illustrations, in primary colours, are simple, bright and often very funny as the animals in the pictures are doing unusual things – baby elephants on the slide, crabs crossing the road, for example, which adds fun to the learning experience.

Rosemary Hetherington

Francesca Simon (Emily Bolam illus)

The Topsy-Turvies

Orion 2005 36pp (hbk) £9.99 1842551094



The Topsy-Turvies (T-T's) are a family who do everything backwards. They sleep by day, are awake by night, eat in the bedroom and rest in the kitchen! Indeed, they

have their own novel take on life.

This zany and larger-than-life family's everyday rituals are the opposite to ours and therein lies the humour! The strength and the weakness of this book lies in this simple premise. While the joke can drag for the adult reader, it is definitely pitched at a toddler's sense of humour, e.g. the parents' request to wash your feet for dinner. In the story all adult norms, do's and should-do's are turned on their head.

The cartoon-like feel of the text is reinforced by illustrations which are bright, breezy, colourful and two dimensional. The illustrations get lots of giggles, particularly when the T-T's 'fix' their next-door neighbour's house while babysitting – a task which involves upturning every stick of furniture, much to its youngest resident's surprise and to my toddler's delight.

As for plot, the T-T's save the day with the arrival and imminent departure of a burglar during their babysitting stint, who can't cope with their topsy-turvy style welcome. One feels this could be a series with many more topsy-turvy adventures to come.

For me the book was predictable and the text plodded too much. However, it must be said that following a reading of the T-T's, I observed my husband and daughter reading their next chosen bedtime story upside down and I had to rethink: Am I child-enough to review this book?

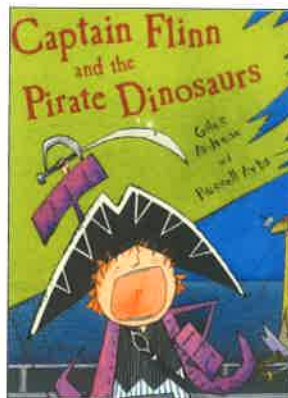
Dolores O'Donnell

4+

Giles Andreae (Russell Ayto illus)

Captain Flinn and the Pirate Dinosaurs

Penguin 2005 32pp (pbk) £10.99 0670913553



This delightful book is sure to please; pirates and dinosaurs? What could be better than a picturebook featuring both from this well-known duo, here working together for the first time? Giles Andreae's adventure story is engaging, exuberant and witty, and the same goes for Russell Ayto's

illustrations. As the story unfolds his deft and expressive penmanship shows character and action through subtle marks and with great blocks of saturated colour and black. Flinn needs to get some pens from the art cupboard in his classroom and this dark space is the portal through which he and three of his friends set off to find the pirate ship which has been captured by the pirate dinosaurs of the title. Of course they succeed in recapturing the ship from the dinosaurs and all is well as they clamber back into the cupboard and go back to class, to where their teacher has just finished reading a story. The narrative is beautifully paced and full use has been made of the format, sometimes with full spreads filled with one image such as the ship cut away to reveal the interior, sometimes the openings are divided to show multiple images and fast action, and each turn of the page is a feast for the eyes and ears. A must for all pirate and dinosaur lovers.

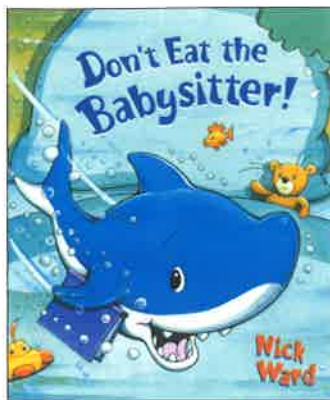
Lucinda Jacob

Nick Ward

Don't Eat the Babysitter!

Picture Corgi 2005 28pp (pbk) £4.99 0551551155

This is the story of Sammy and Sophie Shark and their long-suffering babysitter, Anna. Sammy, an excitable young shark, has the unfortunate, if not altogether surprising, habit of biting things. Sammy Shark crunches his way through everything from the supper



tray to the bedroom and maybe even the babysitter.

The illustrations are drawn with a freshness and simplicity that will appeal to the very young reader. The story gathers momentum as it unfolds, the choice of

page-breaks adding to the sense of suspense.

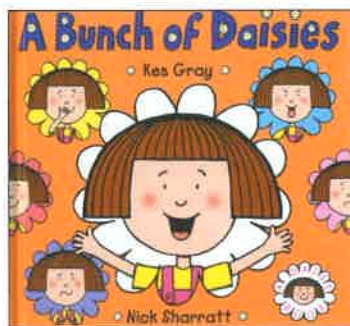
An energetic romp that may not however provide the 'lively bedtime story' intended. Instead the very young reader may become too excited to sleep!

Eileen Phelan

Kes Gray (Nick Sharratt illus)

A Bunch of Daisies

The Bodley Head 2005 40pp (hbk) £10.99 0370327802



This new Daisy book has a pick-and-mix of four short stories and some puzzles which are great fun and full of sly jokes, which 3 – 6-year-olds will love.

Daisy's interactions with her somewhat frustrated Mum are humorously observed, as she attempts to liberate a much-desired cream biscuit from the bottom of the tin without Mum noticing; 'If you want a biscuit, take one from the top.' But in the battle to coax Daisy to write some 'thank-you' notes, Mum definitely gets full marks for her winning strategy against her sudden attack of 'floppyitis'.

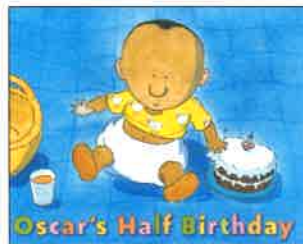
Nick Sharratt's brightly coloured pictures integrate delightfully with the text. He manages to invest Daisies' eyebrows and mouth with just the right expressions, ranging from downright mutiny to happiness. Ideal for reading aloud, with lots to discuss, or alone with lots to think about. Suitable for ages 3–6.

Clodagh Corcoran

Bob Graham

Oscar's Half Birthday

Walker 2005 32pp (hbk) £10.99 1844280292



Oscar's Half Birthday is a charming book. When one tries to analyse the elusive quality of charm, either in person or in book, it is always down to a winning combination of factors. This

illustrated story wins on several fronts.

Simply put, it is the story of a young and very appealing family's inability to wait for their youngest member's first birthday. They decide to celebrate his half birthday with a picnic on Belleview Hill, a peaceful green space near their home in a high-rise complex in the centre of a busy city.

From the outset, it is clear that the author understands and is sensitive to the preoccupations of babies and toddlers and he documents the family outing beautifully. The coat-hanger fairy-wing clad toddler enjoys pressing each and every one of the lift buttons on the descent, and the unsteady birthday boy, barely able to sit alone, responds to a round of applause by keeling over on the picnic rug.

The book portrays family life at its best, while avoiding the saccharin. The characters feel real and are eminently likeable. What's more it is a family who genuinely like being together. The magic in the everyday is ever present in the simply celebrated occasion. The closing scene with parents dancing, dog thumping the beat with his tail and children falling asleep brings memorable closure to a warm tale with a high feel-good factor.

Set in a city centre which has more grime than glamour, the illustrations are realistic, subtle and packed with witty observational detail. Text and watercolour illustrations marry beautifully, both in attention to detail and truth to context.

Language on several occasions borders on the poetic and demands a re-read. The author has a good ear for conversation and all dialogue reads fluently and naturally. There are also opportunities for a child to join in and provide extra vocal backup.

The story is ideal for a 3 to 4 year old, who has sufficient language to appreciate the text (longer than the average picturebook), while fully identifying with the older sibling. It would also work with older children, as there is sufficient detail in both text and illustrations to provide enjoyment.

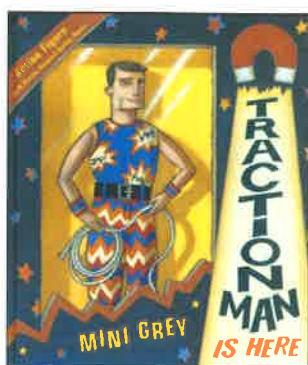
This book is a winner whose basic premise is excellent. Since children always mark their ages in halves, a story about a half birthday makes perfect sense.

Dolores O'Donnell

Mini Grey

Traction Man is Here

Jonathan Cape 2005 32pp (hbk) £10.99 0224064959



Traction Man is Here is an imaginative and engaging picturebook ideally suited to boys aged 3 to 7, who have creative, adventure-packed friendships with their action figure toys.

Incorporating loads of interesting background detail (including messy

rooms, to make overstretched parents feel better about our own clutter), *Traction Man's* bold, colourful illustrations and well-written text transport readers into the amazing fantasy world inhabited by boys and their favourite adventure heroes. Here everyday situations in a child's life become the setting for a series of action-packed rescue missions. Helping with the wash-up after breakfast, for example, is an opportunity for Traction Man to don his subaqua diving gear and search the foamy waters of the sink for the wreck of the lost sieve, grappling with a poisonous dish cloth and befriending a brave little scrubbing brush – who becomes the hero's faithful pet – along the way.

A playful anthropomorphism runs throughout the illustrations, with many inanimate objects given faces and body language that lets you know whether they're goodies, baddies or hapless victims of circumstance. While boys and tomboys will love *Traction Man is Here*, an abundance of subtle, often ironic jokes for adult readers make this book entertaining for parents too.

Adrienne Murphy

6+

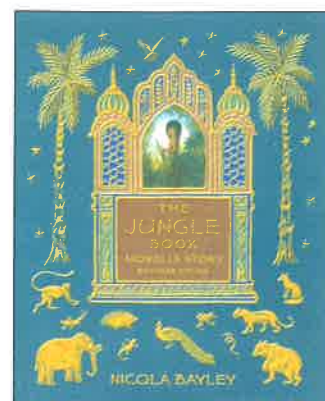
Rudyard Kipling (Nicola Bayley illus)

The Jungle Book

Walker Books 2005 158pp (hbk) £14.99 0744586437

Rudyard Kipling's three tales of the man-cub Mowgli are attractively presented in this elaborate new edition. Although over a hundred years old, these stories have lost none of their appeal, containing as they do all of the classic ingredients of exciting narrative.

From the cover and opening pages it is abundantly clear that this is a book of substance and one to be treasured. Never dominating the written text, Nicola Bayley's exquisite centre borders and detailed illustrations greatly enhance the narrative.



Bayley's attention to detail is a strong feature of her style, as is her use of contrast in the varying moods of the illustrations. Indeed Bayley's illustrations display a keen sensitivity to heightened, dramatic moments in the written text. Her ability to capture texture, particularly in her depiction of Mowgli's friend, Baloo, is remarkable, as is the wonderful interplay of light and shadow in her illustrations. Worthy of comment also are her delicate pencil drawings interspersed throughout the book.

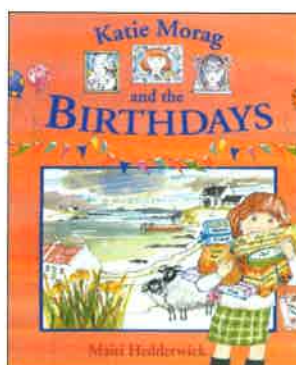
These tales, dealing with Mowgli's rite of passage from boyhood to manhood, involve his gradual understanding and appreciation of the laws of the jungle. The enduring themes of friendship, loyalty and betrayal are powerfully conveyed in both word and image. This is a delightful book, one which can be read to a younger reader or savoured by a more mature one. As the English is quite difficult in places, it could be read independently by a reader of 8 years or more.

Áine Nic Gabhann

Mairi Hedderwick

Katie Morag and the Birthdays

The Bodley Head 2005 42pp (hbk) £10.99 0370328507



The world of Katie Morag is a wonderfully safe and charming environment, set on a small Scottish island, protected by the sea from the big world outside. Katie Morag lives a childhood which may no longer exist, even on small Scottish islands, but is all the more

enchanting for its nostalgic evocation of simpler and happier times. This latest story in the series goes through the year month by month describing the birthdays of Katie's extended family, with a two-page spread for each one. There is an added bonus of a

luscious birthday cake recipe and cards and presents to make, plus a birthday calendar. Katie Morag is of course at the centre of the narrative with her unending question 'When is **MY** birthday?' As the text is simple and elegant, it is the illustrations that tell us so much of the story and convey so much about the characters. I love all the details in the pictures – the little ornaments in every room, the baby eating the birthday card in February, the menu at the Bistro in May and all the cats running around the quayside in June. So many things to look for at each re-reading, so many things to wonder about. Such as who are the couple at the other table in the Bistro that night and how did Katie's uncles, Sven and Sean, become world famous musicians? This curiosity is an indication of how convincing a world Hedderwick has created, with the island itself as a major element. Either in beautifully drawn landscapes or glimpsed through windows and doors, the island appears in almost all the pictures, enfolding the little community in a safe harbour.

Mary McLaughlin

Tony and Jan Payne

It's only Annie!

Dolphin Paperbacks 2005 80pp (pbk) £4.99 1842551590



This book is a collection of four short stories with a young girl called Annie as its central character. Annie is an independent girl and is part of a modern family. Annie's mother, a famous adventurer, is away a lot and according to Annie has a guilty conscience as a result. Her father is rather vague about domestic matters.

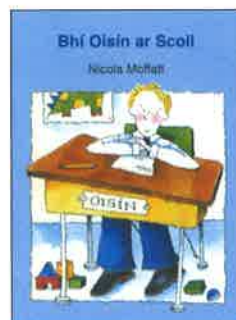
However, Annie is more than capable of thinking and acting for herself. Annie's Gran regularly challenges the stereotype of a grandmother. Their family motto is, 'You don't know what you can do till you try'. This allows Annie and her family to become involved in many colourful and entertaining adventures. Annie is portrayed as a very real little girl whose likes and dislikes are largely typical of girls her age. This book would appeal to readers aged 7 and up.

Eileen Phelan

Nicola Moffat

Bhí Oisín ar Scoil

An Gúm 2005 24pp €4.00 185791497X



Ar dtús is gá go dtuigfí gur leabhar beag 20 leathanach le timpeall 40 focal éagsúil san iomlán atá anseo agus é scríofa do pháistí atá díreach tosaithe ar léamh na Gaeilge.

Bheimís ag súil mar sin, go mbeadh an t-ábhar dírithe ar pháistí thart ar seacht mbliana

d'aois. Dá mba í an Ghaeilge an chéad teanga acu bheidís beagán níos óige b'fhéidir agus beagán níos sine dá mbeadh an Ghaeilge mar ábhar scoile acu.

Bheimís ag súil freisin go bhféadfadh na páistí ionannú leis na carachtair, go mbeadh eachtra beag éigin ag tarlú sa leabhar, go mbeadh an scéal le léamh ó na pictiúir agus go mbeadh na pictiúir agus an scéal sin tarraingteach. Bheimís ag súil nach mbeadh an t-ualach teanga ró-throm ach go mbeadh méid áirithe athrá ann agus go mbeadh an teanga sin laistigh de thaithí na léitheoirí.

Cé go gcomhlíonann an leabhar cuid de na critéir seo ní mholfadh an leirmheastóir seo é. Tá cuma teacsleabhair air. Tá sé suite sa scoil, agus cuma naíonra ar an seomra ranga, seomra nach n-oireann ar chor ar bith don aois ghrúpa atá sna pictiúir. Níl d'eachtra ann ach teacht agus imeacht na bpáistí de réir mar a bhuailéann an cloigín, rud a tharlaíonn sé huairé ó thús go deireadh.

Tá fíorghá agus géarghá ábhar léitheoireachta tarraingteach a léifí ar a shon féin, a chur ar fáil mar thacaíocht agus spreagadh don leitheoir óg. Níl an fhoirmle sa leabhar seo in aon ghar do bheith ceart.

This book, 20 pages and about 40 different words, has been written for children who have just begun to read Irish.

We would expect therefore that the topic would be suitable for children of about 7 years of age. If Irish was their first language they may be younger, or older if Irish was a school subject.

We would expect that the children would be able to identify with the characters, that there would be an interesting storyline, that the story could be read from the illustrations and that it would be attractive. We would hope the language content would not be too heavy and that there would be a certain amount of repetition.

While this book may meet some of those criteria, this reviewer would not recommend it. The book looks like

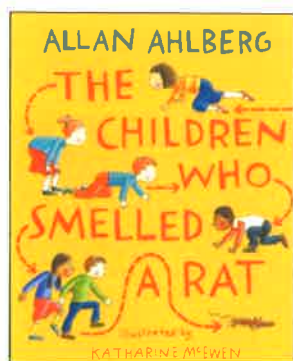
a textbook. It is situated in school, where the classroom resembles that of a pre-school, hardly suitable for the age-group pictured. The comings and goings of the children as the bell rings, which it does six times during the book, is the only storyline.

There is a great need to provide suitable attractive reading material which would be read for its own sake, to support and stimulate children as they begin to acquire and practise the skills necessary to read *as Gaelge*. The formula is not to be found in this book.

Déirdre Uí Ghrádaigh

Allan Ahlberg (Katharine McEwen illus)
The Children Who Smelled a Rat

Walker 2005 80pp (hbk) £9.99 1844280454



Allan Ahlberg's *The Children Who Smelled a Rat* is a sheer delight for the young reader. This pacy narrative deals with a number of concurrent plots, including baby Gary Gaskitt 'rolling away' in a shopping trolley, a teacher who seems to be an imposter and the hilarious

tale of Hector the cat being hypnotised by a caged bird. With a marvellous juggling of character and episode, the reader is captivated from the opening to the closing pages. Katharine McEwen's witty illustrations create a lively dynamic with the written text. Both illustrations and verbal text are outrageously funny but also provide rich and indeed clever narrative perspectives.

What delighted me about this book was the energetic quality of both the storytelling and illustration. Avoiding linear narrative proves to be a highly successful device. Various techniques are employed which enhance the creativity and joy of storytelling itself as craft. Playfulness is the key tone of this book, perhaps most powerfully conveyed in the unpredictability of the narrative. Children are valued as clever readers of text and illustration and will relish the playful asides throughout.

This book is a hilarious *tour de force* which recognises the intelligence and sophistication of the child reader. Its exciting exploitation of both form and format is to be commended. Highly recommended for 6–8 year olds, although equally captivating for older readers.

Áine Nic Gabhann

8+

Siobhán Parkinson

Second Fiddle (or How to Tell a Blackbird from a Sausage)

Puffin 2005 (pbk) 191pp £4.99 0141318805

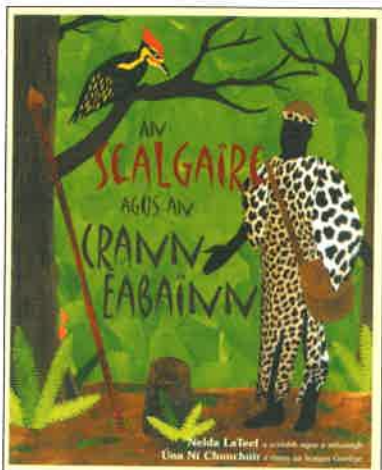
Fans of Siobhán Parkinson's earlier fiction – and, particularly perhaps, of novels such as *Sisters...No Way!* and *Four Kids Three Cats Two Cows One Witch (maybe)* – will know her ability to create complex plots which keep readers wondering right to the very last page about their resolution. It really is often a tantalising question of watching the artist paint her way into a corner: we have full faith in her skill to extricate herself eventually, but are never quite sure about the details of her withdrawal. In the case of her new novel the starting point is quite straightforward. What we have, in essence, is a story which concentrates, following a chance meeting, on the development of a friendship between two pre-teenage girls and on the ways in which that friendship is influenced by the girls' respective familial and domestic backgrounds. (The setting, it should be said, is delicately sketched in as contemporary Irish, though this does not amount to a significant dimension to the novel; much more significant is the role played by music, more specifically as implied by the 'second fiddle' of the title.)

The Parkinson contemporary narrative is contextualised within a framework which, sometimes quite mischievously, sometimes slightly self-consciously, allows for a wide-ranging allusive consideration of, *inter alia*, fiction itself, of narrators (reliable and otherwise), of the creation of 'characters', of happy endings and ultimately of the interconnectedness of life and literature. Motifs from traditional fairytale, from Victorian and from contemporary children's fiction are all effectively employed. If this makes the novel seem rather heavy, rest assured that Parkinsonian wit is as much in evidence as ever, nicely balancing the 'longing, aching' sort of sadness which has always so convincingly been an important aspect of her perception and portrayal of young adolescence.

Robert Dunbar

Nelda LaTeef (Úna Ní Chonchúir – leagan Gaeilge)
An Sealgaire agus an Crann Éabainn

An Gum 2005 32pp (pbk) €7.50 1857915526



Seanchaí i bPoblacht na Nígre san Aifric a d'inis an scéal sa leabhar tarraingteach seo ina theanga dhúchais féin Zarmais. Ba laochra fíochmhara iad na Zarmaigh agus cuireadh an scéal féin cuid de shean-scéalta gaisce na

hÉireann i gcuimhne duit. Is ábhar spéise é na cosúlachtaí a bhíonn sa chultúr ó thír go tír.

Bhí athair ag iarraidh fear oiriúnach láidir a roghnú mar chéile dá iníon álainn óg a raibh an-tóir ag na fir ar fad uirthi. Shíl an cailín féin nár leor fear láidir, go mbeadh níos mó ná sin ag teastáil agus cheap sí plan – phósfadh sí an fear a bheadh in ann saighead a chur sa chrann éabainn a bhí i gceartlár an bhaile.

Tháinig fir ina scórtha agus níor éirigh leo. Ansin tháinig an sealgaire ard scafánta lá. Chonaic sé an cailín a rinne meangadh gáire leis ag an tobar agus shocraigh sé gurb é féin a phósfadh í. Le cabhair cnagaire, damhan alla agus féileacán – seift mhaith agus cairde dílse – éiríonn leis.

Is iad an líonaíocht agus na dathanna a chuireann cuma chomh tarraingteach ar an leabhar seo. Is deas léargas ar ghné de shaol na hAifrice a fheiceáil nach saol an bhochtanaís agus an gátair é. Tá na héadaí galánta chomh dathúil agus fós tá na pobail ann mar thithe sa ghaineamhlach agus na prócaí móra traidisiúnta, na buicéid adhmaid agus na plandaí gleoite mar mhaisiú in go leor de na pictiúir.

Is breá an bealach é seo le teacht ar thuiscintí áirithe ar shaol agus ar chultúr na Nígre. Bheadh sé suimiúil mar ábhar cainte le daoine a thagann chugainn ón Nígir. D'fhéadfaí cuireadh isteach a thabhairt do Nígireach a bheadh in ann labhairt faoin ábhar nó faoi cuid dá bhfuil le feiceáil sna pictiúir.

Is cinnte go bhfuil leathnú ann ar thaithí saoil an pháiste Éireannaigh agus cé nach mbeadh go leor de na páistí in ann é a léamh dóibh féin ba chóir é a bheith i ngach cúinne leabhar ó rang 3 nó 4 ar aghaidh. D'fhéadfaí an leabhar a léamh do na páistí ach b'fhiú deis a thabhairt dóibh ar dtús ciall a bhaint as na pictiúir iad féin agus tuairimí faoin ábhar a bhailiú

uathu. B'fhiú freisin an scéal a chur ar téip nó diosca go bhféadfadh na páistí éisteacht leis arís agus arís.

The traditional story in this attractive book was collected from an old Zarama storyteller in Nigeria. Zarama warriors bear a certain resemblance to Irish heroes of old and one is also reminded of some familiar stories. It is interesting to note the similarities in cultures from one country to another.

A man was seeking a suitable husband for his beautiful daughter who had many admirers. The daughter agreed that strength alone would not be sufficient in a good partner and so it was decided that she would marry the man who could pierce the ebony tree in the village with his spear.

Many tried and failed in this task until a handsome hunter came along one day. Seeing the beautiful daughter smile at him, he decided he would be the one to marry her. With the help of a woodpecker, a spider and a butterfly, a good plan and loyal friends, he succeeds.

It is interesting to get a perspective on Nigeria that is not based on poverty. The story is enhanced by interesting artwork and lovely colours. The clothes are beautiful and colourful, yet the desert and the tents, the vessels, pots, wooden buckets and exotic plants have a sense of place.

This book could be an innovative way to introduce some understanding of old Nigerian culture. It would be interesting to find some Nigerian people who could discuss the topics with the children in school or in the library.

Certainly this book could be used to broaden experiences for Irish children in third or fourth class. The story could be read to them and, even though the children may not read it themselves, it would be interesting to see how much would be gleaned from the illustrations before it is read. It would also be worth recording so the children could listen and follow the story.

Déirdre Uí Ghrádaigh

Helen Armstrong
Nip's Tale

Dolphin 2005 150pp (pbk) £4.99 184255106X

Nip is a likeable terrier who, after a bungled, violent burglary, begins to question the morality of his owner Jeth's way of life. When Nip rescues the watchman whom Jeth has left beaten and tied up, the dog ends up on the receiving end of his owner's brutal temper on a journey replete with the dramatic adventures and narrow escapes that characterise

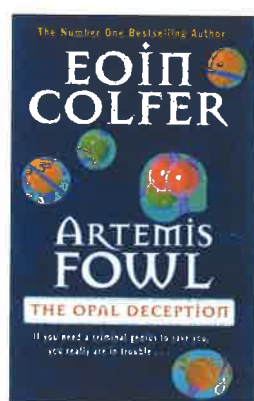
Armstrong's novels. In a narrative that pulls together elements intended to grab the newly fluent reader's attention the two dogs meet up with a circus, befriend an orangutan and encounter a dancing deer before a terrifying confrontation with the cruel ex-owner. The story is told using simple language in a first-person, present-tense narrative supposedly indicative of the dog's ignorance of the human world around him. The repetitive structure of the text and the reduction of all dialogue to the same simple language patterns can become irksome over sustained reading but young readers will still enjoy the animal camaraderie and heroics.

Katie Agnew

Eoin Colfer

Artemis Fowl – The Opal Deception

Puffin 2005 343pp (hbk) £12.99 0141381647



This is the fourth book about Artemis Fowl, the boy genius and his escapades in the fairy world. Like the other three titles, the sub-terranean world is a high-tech realm with high security and a cast of characters with varied talents and agendas. Artemis continues to be the only human who has a hope of outsmarting them. However,

this time rather than being a fairy foe he is enlisted as a fairy friend. Artemis is prompted to unite with his old adversaries, LEPrecon Police Officer Holly Short, Foaly the Centaur and dwarf Mulch Diggums as they attempt to defeat the evil pixie Opal Koboi.

There is no doubt that it is an action-packed read that races along. It has plenty of plot twists and humorous asides to keep a young reader turning pages but the story is lacking in any real characters or character development. All of the characters are one dimensional and Artemis, the only human, grows less and less believable. The criminal mastermind of the earlier books has developed an unbelievable soft centre. A more stable home environment is credited as the reason for this new kinder Artemis, but we see so little of Fowl Manor that this change of heart is unsupported. His greed and ambition, so evident in the earlier stories, is mostly disregarded here.

Attempts to summarise action from the earlier novels don't always run smoothly, though a notable exception to this is the witty prologue written as an

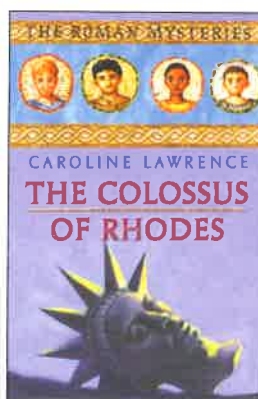
anonymous web-blog. The constant array of new gadgets, weapons and particularly the antics of the dwarf Mulch Diggums do keep the pace fast and at times furious. Existing Artemis fans will certainly enjoy this instalment.

Mags Walsh

Caroline Lawrence

The Colossus of Rhodes

Orion 2005 212pp (hbk) £10.99 1842552538



This is Book 9 (or rather Book IX) of the Roman Mysteries series, which has been very popular since first published in 2001. Hardly surprising, as they include some of the most classical elements of children's literature – the detective story format, an exotic background and a group of spirited children with minimal adult

intervention. In this case, a kind of Nancy Drew meets *Gladiator*. The children are two well-born Romans, Flavia and Jonathan, Flavia's slave girl Nubia, and Lupus who was originally a beggar boy. The villain of the piece is nicknamed *The Colossus of Rhodes*, an evil shadowy figure, who has been kidnapping children. Several clues lead them on a sea voyage to Rhodes, a journey full of incident and danger, echoing the journey of Jason and the Argonauts.

Lawrence's knowledgeable re-creation of ancient Roman life is impressive. The perils of the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, tales of gods and heroes merge with the narrative to form a credible and absorbing story. The fascination is often in the detail – food, clothes, offerings to the gods, the minutiae of shipboard life. Nor does she ignore the darker side, describing how Lupus had his tongue cut out, the death of his father and the dreadful fate of the abducted children, which has a resonance with our own times. Historical fiction is not as popular as it once was, but the author is an honourable successor to Sutcliffe and Renault and, as a classical scholar, she also provides in these stories, interesting and accurate material for the Early Peoples strand of the primary curriculum.

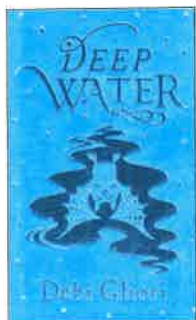
Although part of a series, this volume can be enjoyably read alone, serving to encourage readers to explore the previous books.

Mary McLaughlin

Debi Gliori

Deep Water

Doubleday 2005 335pp (pbk) £10.99 0385606303



This is the latest book about the Strega-Borgia family, their butler, nanny and pets. If you have already read one of these you will find all the usual ingredients – plenty of humour, magic, action and suspense. Within the world of fantasy and magic, the two older children are very recognisably real-

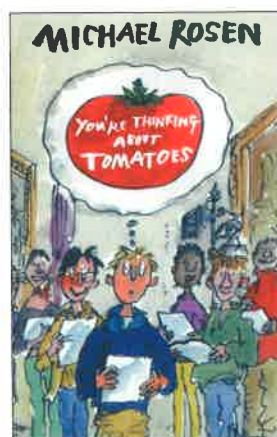
life characters. The others tend to be caricatures but very funny. Debi Gliori's somewhat outlandish imagination has created some hilarious, exciting and chaotic situations. It will appeal to the 8–12-year-olds who enjoy mayhem and lavatorial jokes. For the reading-aloud adult there are some more subtle strands of humour which will make them chuckle. However, as with so many series, it would be better to read these books in order of publication as there are references to previous episodes. What is probably more irritating, there is not a complete resolution at the end and you have to wait until the next book is published.

Audrey Baker

Michael Rosen

You're Thinking about Tomatoes

Barn Owl Books 2005 152pp (pbk) £4.99 1903015448



School tours around museums and stately houses can be particularly boring, especially if they involve filling out a copious worksheet in a short space of time. History, itself, however, need not be a dry series of facts, as Frank, the hero of *You're Thinking about Tomatoes*, discovers when the objects on display in Chiltern House come alive

before his eyes. By talking to a mummy, a pack of lead soldiers, an Indian statue and a servant girl who has escaped from a painting, Frank gradually pieces together the true history of this great estate, a story which many would rather remained forgotten.

You're Thinking about Tomatoes, sequel to Rosen's earlier novel, *You're Thinking about Doughnuts*, is a quirky read which subtly draws the reader's attention to the less savoury aspects of British history. Quentin

Blake's illustrations provide the perfect zany match to Rosen's style, while the snappy chapter headings, short chapters and gory details will surely attract younger readers (primarily boys). I do wonder, however, whether the frequent references to musicals and film stars from the past, might not be just a bit confusing to today's generation. How many children today would be familiar with Charlie Chaplin and Cary Grant? While Rosen has clearly made some attempts to engage younger readers (Not-Sheba, Frank's partner in crime, has an extremely creative way of insulting her elders), much of the 'wit' in the book relies on an adult knowledge of popular culture.

Lindsay Myers

11+

Elizabeth Fensham

Helicopter Man

Bloomsbury 2005 160pp (pbk) £5.99 0747575495



In *Helicopter Man* Fensham does for schizophrenia what Mark Haddon did for Asperger's, except that Fensham's main protagonist (Pete, age 12) is not the one suffering from the illness, it's his dad. But Pete too suffers. He suffers the burden of the responsibility of having to care for

his father – 'It's tough being your dad's dad.'

When his father is eventually admitted to hospital, Pete gets to re-experience childhood in his new foster home. Basketball, friends, girls and his treasured pet mice are a taste of what the boy has been missing. His pet mice in particular provide not only necessary comic relief to the story, but also, because they are named after relatives, they become a means to learning more about the boy's family history. The mice also serve as a parallel to Pete's own family. When the father mouse begins to eat its own offspring, it has to be separated from its family to allow the litter to grow. Pete's separation from his dad also allows him to grow by bringing him closer to understanding his father's illness and to solving the mystery of what happened to his mother.

The book, written in diary format, is brimming with the authenticity and honesty of a child's voice. The

seemingly thoughtless sentences are realistically childish and therefore are often unintentionally very funny or very sad. Fenshaw never lectures or patronises but provides hope rather than answers or happy endings.

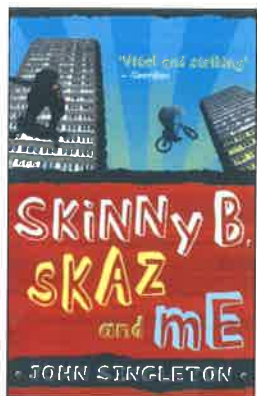
Suitable for the 11+ age group.

Kieran Fanning

John Singleton

Skinny B, Skaz and me

Puffin 2005 274pp (pbk) £4.99 0141316098



The 'me' of John Singleton's novel is 13-year-old Lee Matthews, a young man going through what his mother refers to at one point as 'the running-the-gauntlet-stage of adolescence'. The obstacles to be encountered en route are to be found in his family, school and local neighbourhood environments. In the first there are

parents, grandmother and, most significantly, a younger sister ('Skinny B') suffering from leukaemia: some of the most telling moments of Lee's story involve his shifting relationships with her, his perception of her place in the family's affections and his gradual insight into her emotional strengths. School would seem (biology teacher apart) to be dominated by Lee's early sexual promptings, focusing on his attempts to earn the attentions of Alison and win her away from some highly undesirable acquaintances. (The word 'friend' here takes on many interpretations.) Where the local neighbourhood is concerned, we are in a strongly contemporary urban landscape – some vague hints suggest a north of England setting – the playground of 'street scum ... pushers, twockers and retards ...' From such an assortment of humanity Singleton succeeds in constructing a narrative in which, despite a register and vocabulary which at times seem almost wilfully impenetrable, the various strands come together quite powerfully.

Robert Dunbar

Philip Ridley

Zip's Apollo

Puffin 2005 300pp (pbk) £4.99 0141313846

Philip Ridley is well established as a master of magic realism in children's fiction, his writing blending complex themes and contemporary issues – dysfunctional families, physical disability, homelessness – with

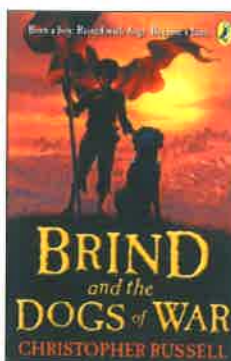
quirky plot twists and otherworldly characters and settings. Here the redemptive power of friendship to overcome loss and grief is contrasted with the mindless bureaucracy and petty officialdom of a sprawling urban society. The relentlessly cheerful 'Happy Clappy' Zip, recently returned to the mainstream world after years spent living in a forest as an eco-warrior, is struggling to care for his mentally ill mother and a grandmother suffering the after-effects of a stroke. He teams up with 'Gloomy Doomy' Nabil, united by a shared sense of loss and their isolation from the outside world, suggested through the half-built houses and unnamed streets of the bland and largely unoccupied 'New Town' to which both have recently moved. The lives of the boys and their widening circle of friends are transformed by the discovery of a supermarket shopping trolley with magical powers. The empathetic trolley provides much of the physical care and emotional attention that are lacking at home, and when it is threatened Zip and his friends face a difficult, even dangerous, battle with The Powers That Be. Ridley's style is characterised by his use of dialogue; much of the narrative is conveyed through speech and each character has its own, very distinctive, voice. The result is a fast-paced story with immediate appeal and plenty for young readers to think about.

Kate Agnew

Christopher Russell

Brind and the Dogs of War

Puffin 2005 198pp (pbk) £4.99 0141318546



The cover of this book, with its 'fantasy art' styled airbrushing of a boy in rags standing beside a fearsome hound, in front of the backdrop of a raging battle, excited me immensely. As did the subtitle – 'Born a boy. Raised with dogs. Became a hero.' Inside the cover, however, I was surprised (and a little disappointed) not to

find an original fantasy story, but instead historical fiction set in the chivalric era of lords and knights.

The novel tells the tale of Brind, the 'dog boy,' who lives with and commands Sir Edmund's pack of ferocious mastiffs. When Sir Edmund takes the boy, the dogs and his villainous huntsman, Tullo, to France to fight for his king against the French, an action-packed adventure ensues.

While Russell is strong on action and narrative, he is

weak on characterisation. He fails to take the wonderful opportunity to get inside the head of the 'dog boy' Brind. What a fantastic psychological study it could have been but isn't. Instead, the 'dog boy' is depicted as a rather two-dimensional character who is neither dog nor boy. Brind lacks the humanity of a boy but also the rather basic canine qualities of a dog. For example, there are two occasions in the book when Brind's poor hearing lets him down! The character of Aurelie is also unconvincing, but there is possibly enough action and pace in the narrative to prevent most 9+ readers from noticing or even caring.

Kieran Fanning

13+

Mary Arrigan
Chocolate Moon

Barrington Stoke 2005 76pp (pbk) £4.99 1842992937

I am a big fan of Barrington Stoke Publishers. They are unique among publishers for children, specialising in books for reluctant and underconfident readers. They have a panel of young readers who comment on the manuscripts prior to being carefully edited to suit the required reading age level (in this case 8+).

This is a big-themed book which ends up like a taster menu for a much larger feast! The theme, dear to my heart, is of ageing and a boy's familial relationships as he passes from childhood to young adulthood. Chris and his grandmother are pitted against his father and mother as Gran begins to show signs of Alzheimer's disease.

The book does not have the scope to really investigate the relationship between Chris and his Gran, between Chris and his dad, between his dad and his Gran and between Chris and his pal, Billy. All these are quite wonderfully and tantalisingly introduced but not really developed past the surface ... the limitation of a short book.

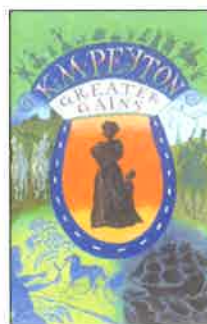
Two inconsistencies which I wondered about in the book was the 'disappearance' of the mother from the narrative, and also the dad and son in the front seats of the car on the return journey home with the poor old Gran in the back seat! Surely Chris, or his 'disappeared mother' could have sat with her to reassure her that all would be well?

But having said all that, I think that the book will be a welcome addition for the older, less experienced reader who might want something 'more real' to read.

Finian O'Shea

KM Peyton
Greater Gains

David Fickling Books 2005 326pp £10.99 038560811X



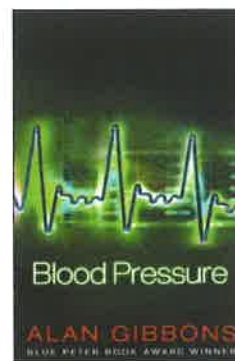
KM Peyton is probably best known for the *Flambards* series, less because the first book won her the Carnegie Medal and the *Guardian* award but more because it was televised. She is primarily a storyteller and some of her 50 or so books have a great deal more depth than the *Flambards* ones.

This, however, is more on the *Flambards* lines, complete with horses. It is the second of another series, this time set in the early 19th century. Although there are many historical touches the main characters tend to behave very like modern teenagers. On the whole they are well drawn with realistic strengths and weaknesses. It is an exciting story with plenty of romantic relationships. Not everything works out happily and some strands are left unresolved, presumably to be picked up in the next book. It can be read on its own but it is more enjoyable if *Small Gains* is read first. It will be popular with teenage girls.

Audrey Baker

Alan Gibbons
Blood Pressure

Dolphin 2005 198pp (pbk) £5.99 184255199X



Aidan lives the ideal dream, a happy teenager, with happy parents, in a happy middle-class home. Add to that his girlfriend Emily, and his life is nearly perfect, apart from some violent and inexplicable dreams which he has throughout his childhood. The shock of discovering that the very foundation of this life is

built on very porous sand threatens to tear his family apart. The first half of this book is a real page-turner, with enough twists and turns to keep the reader enthralled. An unexpected and unwelcome enforced visit to Liverpool to see his dying grandfather with his

mother sends his life into freefall as he discovers in rapid succession that he is adopted, his father is a psychotic local criminal and his mother lived with him for the first two years of Aidan's life.

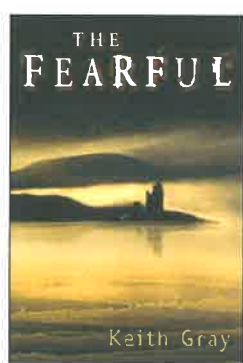
Gibbons explores these conflicts in a deeply satisfying and brutally honest way as he lets Aidan reveal his own feelings about family love and betrayal. I thought the ending was compromised by his treatment of the local girl Jade, who he in turn betrays by choosing to exclude her from his life, as he returns to the altogether safer ground of Emily and A levels. Highly recommended for age 12+.

Clodagh Corcoran

older
teens

Keith Grey
The Fearful

The Bodley Head 2005 293pp (hbk) £10.99 0370328361



The Fearful is an extraordinary novel, playing with notions of perception, assumption and belief from its very outset. The narrative revolves around local adherence to myth, with a group of villagers maintaining a weekly ritual sacrifice to an unseen monster in the lake. The relationships in the novel

however are deeply complicated, with Tim, the protagonist, struggling between loyalty to his family and to his community as he approaches the time when he is expected to take over as master of ceremonies at The Feeding, and his own essential lack of belief in either the monster or the tradition. At the level of narrative, this is a rich, evocative and at times frightening story about community, generation, and trust; beneath the surface, however, lurk universal questions about belief, faith and how one comes to test and know the truth about oneself and others. This is a rich and haunting novel to which a sensitive reader will return again and again; I didn't want it to end and began a second reading the moment I had finished the first. It will engage any thoughtful reader over the age of 12.

AJ Piesse

John Sedden

Mudlark

Puffin 2005 244pp (pbk) £4.99 0141318686

John Sedden's *Mudlark* is, we are informed, a debut novel and, clearly, especially if judged with this fact in mind, it is one of considerable assurance and achievement. The characterisation, particularly of Reg and Jimmy, the 14-year-old-friends at its centre, is rich, rounded and humorous: the portrait of youthful male bonding which emerges is perceptive and touching. The setting, in both time and place, is drawn with some distinction. The Portsmouth of 1914, more specifically its impoverished harbour area and its entertainingly diverse range of adult characters and businesses, is atmospherically and colourfully evoked. Most significant of all, that feature of the boys' lives which endows them with their unique vision of the world and their place in it – their being 'mudlarks', who dive into the blackness of the harbour mud in search of the occasional farthing, tanner or shilling – promises to give the novel the fascination of a complex social document.

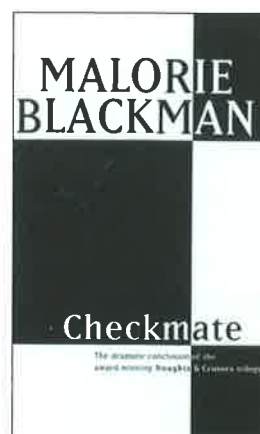
Sadly, however, this promise is not fulfilled. In the second half of the novel Sedden's control of narrative and plot diminishes and the arrival of war and its effect on the two boys' lives are depicted in terms where stereotype and hysteria combine. There is a wildly absurd sequence involving – allegedly – Jack the Ripper, where the intended horrific note gives way to the frankly risible. What might have been an idiosyncratic contribution to our children's literature of World War I and early adolescence has been sacrificed to the interests of sensationalism.

Robert Dunbar

Malorie Blackman

Checkmate

Random House 2005 512pp (pbk) £12.99 0385607733



This novel is the final part of an award-winning trilogy set in a world ruled by blacks, in which whites are deemed inferior and are socially and politically disadvantaged. While the first book of the trilogy deals with the forbidden inter-racial love affair of adolescents Callum and Sephy – the daughter of a corrupt, racist and powerful politician –

the teenage protagonist of *Checkmate* is their 'halfer' daughter, Callie Rose, born after her father's execution for terrorism.

On one level this is a complexly structured and impressively sustained thriller in which Callie Rose is drawn into the callously brutal politico-racial strife which underpins the society in which she lives.

Equally, the novel concerns itself with the portrayal of an adolescent putting away childish things and embracing the complexities and compromises that govern adult behaviour. These help explain what had appeared to be the unforgivable sins of maternal lies and lack of love.

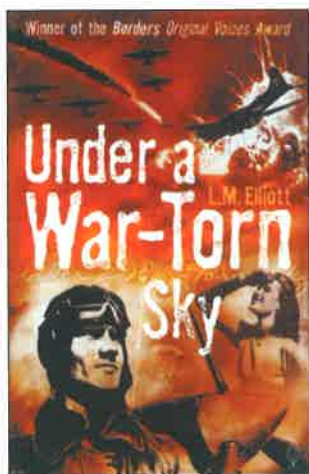
The novel is weakened somewhat by its ending, in which Blackman, much too consciously, leaves several narrative strands dangling, and in which she insists, totally unnecessarily, in drawing parallels between Callie Rose's personal relationships and those of her mother.

Carole Redford

LM Elliott

Under a War-Torn Sky

Usborne 2005 295pp (pbk) £5.99 0746067313



This is a coming-of-age story set within an historical fiction of a downed US airman in 1944 France. Hank learns to understand his overbearing and cold father whose attitude to the world was shaped by the Depression as he is conveyed along the resistance-maintained escape route through Vichy France. The coming-of-age

story is more successful than the historical narrative which is marred by stereotypes and unbelievable melodramatic twists. Gestapo are all cold, blue-eyed, blond automatons; we know to expect betrayal when a guide has bad teeth and a crooked smile, and it is asking more than is bearable of the reader to believe that the Maquis would not spot a disconnected distributor cable in a broken-down truck. Hank's escape from the Gestapo is so unbelievable it is unintentionally funny. The themes that relate to the American background – social class, rural poverty and mixed opinion on involvement in a European war – are well handled. The themes that relate to the war

are less well handled; for instance the author seems unaware that Lord 'Haw Haw' was of Anglo-Irish stock, though she is good on the divisions within the French Resistance. A feature of the book are the links via the Usborne website to good-quality websites, such as BBC History, Schoolnet and Spartacus, with substantial content. Aimed at the fluent reader of 14–16.

Martin Maguire

Melvin Burgess

Bloodsong

Andersen Press 2005 336 pp (hbk) £14.99 1842701797

Gay sex, masturbation and teenage pregnancy sit alongside betrayal, warfare and infanticide in this aptly named gore fest from master of controversy, Melvin Burgess.

Inspired by the Volsunga Saga, Burgess utilises the story of Sigurd, his battle with the dragon and his doomed love for Brynhild: transplanting the characters and themes into a dystopian vision of a post-apocalyptic future; where technological, chemical and genetic advances have turned sour, with disastrous consequences for mankind.

This is an amazing reworking of the Norse myth. Burgess has a genuine regard for the entire cast of characters, with the result that each is well rounded and enlists a similar esteem from the reader. Sigurd, while godlike, is only too human, and the fantastic elements of the story (the dragon/monster Fafnir, the shape-changing Grimhild) are rendered believable through the futuristic setting, where experiments with genomes and bio-engineering have led to clones, mixed species, cyborgs and mind control devices.

Shifts in the narrative voice ensure a rapid pace and extra insight into the minds of the main characters, so that while the plot gallops towards the inevitably tragic conclusion, the reader is pulled into the midst of the action, where the distinctions between heroes and villains are blurred.

This is a sequel to *Bloodtide* but it isn't necessary to have read the first to enjoy the second, which stands well on its own. Nor is it necessary to have prior knowledge of the Volsunga Saga; however, interested readers may be inspired to read around the topic.

Bloodsong is not for the faint hearted, squeamish or easily offended. Mature readers will find this highly original and bold work to be gripping, well written, enthralling, cautionary and unflinching.

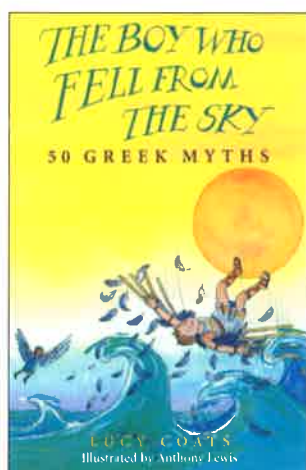
Paula McGeever

retold

Lucy Coats

**The Boy Who Fell from the Sky
50 Greek Myths**

Dolphin 2005 167pp (pbk) £5.99 1842551450



Lucy Coats can tell a story! And what a feast of stories we have in this collection of Greek myths. Wisely, Coats seems to follow a chronological pattern, beginning with the love between Gaia, the Earth and her husband Uranus, the sky and their battling offspring the beautiful Titans and the ugly Cyclopes.

We have stories that explain for example, why Mount Etna to this day is 'spewing smoke and flames ... raining down boiling stones on the poor of Sicily' and why the Aegean Sea is so called. The sad plight of Icarus is summed up in the final words 'the grandmothers, who know, say that Icarus' spirit rises up from the sea every night, and flies up to the heavens to play with the stars'. We have scenes which explode with graphic detail, lending humour and realism to each story such as the entrance of the river god Asopus who 'dripped his way angrily into Sisypheus's throne room, trailing weed over the floor'.

Each story is rooted in moral uprightness but it is of the earthy, practical kind. When King Minos has a problem he thinks 'I need a hero ... I wonder if my friend Eurystheus would lend me Heracles.'

These are short, gripping yarns. The black and white illustrations depict a strange world of humans, gods and monsters. Meanwhile Coats has a master plan:

'But that is another story for another time and another place, because it's time for bed.'

Suitable for the 8+ reader.

Helen Ryan

Amanda Hall

Prince of the Birds

Frances Lincoln 2005 28pp (hbk) £10.99 1845071026



Prince of the Birds is an elegant fairytale sparingly told by Amanda Hall. Young Prince Ahmed, kept prisoner in a high tower by a caring but misguided father, must outwit his

masters and teachers in order to find true love. In the tradition of tales from the *Arabian Nights* he is helped by talking birds, an enchanted horse and even a flying carpet in his quest to win the hand of Princess Aldegonda. *Prince of the Birds* is both a straightforward adventure and a parable of the power of the poetic soul to fulfill 'what is written in the stars'. It is retold from a series of tales by the 19th century American writer Washington Irving and weaves the romance of Arabian fantasy into the landscape of medieval Spain. This view of Spain will be new to some readers and provides Amanda Hall with ample opportunities for lavish illustrations which are the real heart of the book, from the prince's lonely tower, into the magical cave to the crowded streets of Moorish Seville and beyond. Young children will enjoy having the story read to them and will cheer both the courage and the cunning of the young hero. Older children will enjoy the romance. All will appreciate Amanda Hall's colourful arabesque of an old tale retold. Suitable for age 6 +.

Jan Winter

reissued

Dorothy Edwards

A Strong and Willing Girl

Jane Nissen Books 2005 112pp (pbk) £6.99 1903252202

'When I look back on me young days, I don't ever remember a time when I wasn't working' is the sad opening sentence of this account of a child's working life at the end of the 19th century. Just after her tenth birthday in 1887, Nan left home for the first time and 'went out into service'. As Jacqueline Wilson writes in the introduction 'each chapter is a story in itself' as Nan recalls the very different people for whom and



with whom she has worked. The book is based on the life of the author's Aunt Grace, a maidservant in a Victorian household, and the book does read like a recorded reminiscence. The first-person narrative gives the story a very direct appeal. Nan comes across as hard working, resourceful and 'tender-hearted'.

Despite the opening first line there is not a trace of self-pity just an acceptance of and pride in her work, much humorous observation and sometimes evidence that Nan is still a child. As support material for a history project, in upper primary school, the book provides an engaging account of the working life of a child. Through the text, somewhat unconsciously perhaps, the attitudes and rigid social structure of the time is conveyed. The black and white illustrations add detail to the text. I particularly liked the drawing of the 'town stretcher-on-wheels with the canvas cover'. Nan's story could also be used to explore childhood in different societies and cultures.

Rosemary Hetherington

Margaret Mahy (Margaret Chamberlain illus)

The Very Wicked Headmistress

Barn Owl Books 2005 94pp (pbk) £4.99 1903015464

The story's central character Miss Tatiana Taffeta is a strong independent female. She is also an infamous cheater and blackmailer and has made some unusual career choices in her time. She has been both a trapeze artist and a human cannonball and all of this before opening a select school for rich young ladies. 'Miss Taffeta enjoyed danger!'

Other characters central to the story are Bainbridge, Miss Taffeta's brother, who believes himself to be a gorilla at heart; Mr Fendalton Bassett, a very susceptible man; and his orphaned nephew, Tancred, whose responsibility is to protect his uncle from impulsively falling in love with every woman he meets.

The story is a riotous mix of fantasy and reality involving the volcanic eruption of custard and the discovery of diamonds within it.

This is a modern fairytale and is both witty and fast-moving. In contrast to traditional fairytales where female characters often lack courage and resourcefulness, the female characters in this story are forceful

and individualistic, typical of Margaret Mahy's work.

This book was first published in 1984 and while the language appears at times slightly formal and old fashioned, the writer's skill still shines through.

Eileen Phelan

Walter R Brooks (Kurt Wiese illus)

Freddy the Detective 087951809X

Freddy and the Space Ship 1585671053

The Overlook Press 2005 264pp (hbk)

www.friendsoffreddy.org



There are few American adults over 50 who are not familiar with Freddy the Pig. He is as well known in the USA as Pooh Bear is in Britain

and Ireland, though the books he features in have more in common with the roughly contemporaneous Doctor Dolittle series, or Rupert Bear perhaps. The first book was *Freddy Goes to Florida* (1927). Despite the success of this and its sequels, the series fell out of print. However, there have been such persistent demands for a reissue, that the entire series of 26 titles (along with four anthologies) has now been reissued in the original hardback format, with dustwrapper. There are similar ventures on this side of the Atlantic too, though on a smaller scale, marking perhaps a renewed interest in ensuring the availability of children's classics from the past.

These stories are not just anthropomorphic accounts of the doings of the animals who live on Mr Bean's farm. They are truly benevolent tales about mainly well-meaning animals whose good-natured and often mistaken projects are almost always conducted for the benefit of the community. But they are still animals: pigs are inclined to be lazy, rats steal things, hens are rather foolish. The star of the stories is Freddy himself – engaging, well-meaning, serious, sometimes lazy but mostly involved in schemes to help things along. The black-and-white illustrations by Kurt Wiese provide precisely evocative images of key moments – a bewhiskered sheriff seeking Freddy's advice under a tree, for example.

These pre-war stories belong to a different age, more kindly, less sophisticated, and almost totally rural. But this publishing venture might just succeed. These

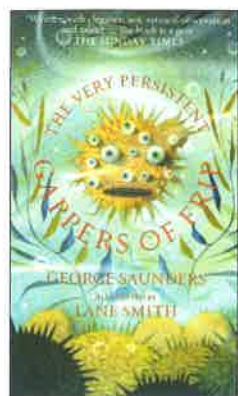
books are not by any means 'easy reads', but the language, the stories and the authorial tone are ideal for newly independent readers beginning to be capable of reading full-length novels.

Victor Watson

George Saunders (Lane Smith illus)

The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip

Bloomsbury 2005 84pp (pbk) £6.99 0747576114



Frip is a small town by the sea, comprising the shacks of three families. They depend on their goats. But the goats are assailed every day by gappers from the sea – like large parasitical burrs which so upset the goats that they can produce no milk. Trying to cope with this crisis is Capable, whose mother has recently died and whose father

in his grief leaves everything to her.

This is a fairytale parable, rather chilling in its effect. The prose is uncompromising in its recounting of the hypocrisies, selfishness, and self-righteousness of the other families, and Lane Smith's illustrations intensify this sense of alienation. Some are warmly engaging, others surreal and compelling in quite different ways. Poignancy is there, but always slightly undercut by satire; not unlike Hans Christian Andersen but without his authorial voice.

This book is designed and produced in the size and format of an ordinary low-cost paperback; but the paper is glossy and the printing is of a high quality. This ambiguity is everywhere – in the deliberate mismatch between content and style, and the slippage between sentiment and satire. Its appeal will be to any young (or adult) readers who can enjoy ambivalence and irony.

Victor Watson

Sinéad de Valera (Tana French illus)

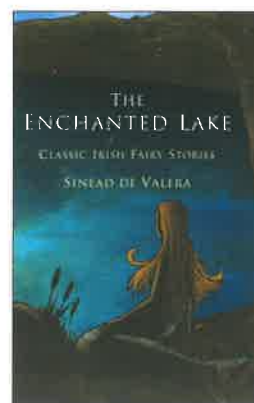
The Enchanted Lake – Classic Irish Fairy Stories

Currach Press 2005 136pp (pbk) €8.99 1856079236

A collection of eight stories told in the oral tradition, these tales range from the quirky to the moral and unflinching end with a happy-ever-after marriage.

Most are based on a quest. The morality of each person attempting the quest is secretly tested and we

usually see at least two unfortunates fail before our hero proves his moral goodness along the treacherous way. In the time-honoured fashion, as in the *Lord of the Rings*, nay even the Harry Potter stories, such a moral triumph is rewarded with the presentation of special gifts to aid our hero achieve his final goal. The ultimate reward is of course the hand of the beautiful maiden.



Laced with humour and at times poetic language, these tales are told with a disarming innocence. The silhouette illustrations perfectly echo this same romantic innocence. Yet we never lose sight of everyday life. The characters live in a rural world of milking cows, gathering firewood, making scant meals out of precious little food. In spite of this, they have an inner life which transcends the shabbiness of the world around them. Their language often reflects this as for example, 'You are welcome as the flowers of May.'

The charm of this book lies in the contrasts between innocent and wily, moral and immoral, and inner and outer beauty. It may be a depiction of a bygone era but its earthy morality is still pertinent today. The large print format adds to its appeal for the 8+ reader.

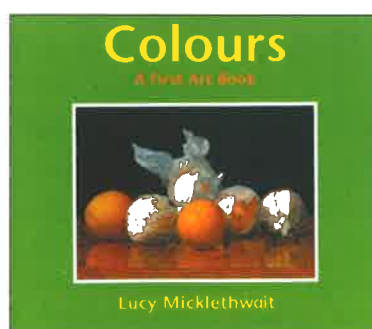
Helen Ryan

art

Lucy Micklethwait

Colours – A First Art Book

Frances Lincoln 2005 20pp (hbk) £9.99 1845072855



This is the second book in a series designed to introduce the very young to the work of great artists, the first, *Animals – A First Art Book*, was recently published to great

acclaim. The author has a notable track record in writing art books for children and many of her previous

titles will be very familiar e.g. the 'I Spy' series (HarperCollins) and her famous Dorling Kindersley published *Discover Great Paintings*.

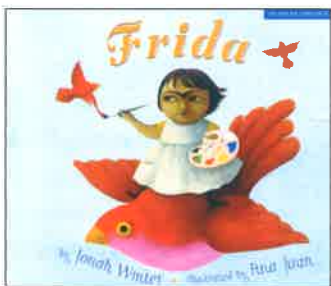
This is essentially a picturebook with words kept to a minimum. The colours are simply named and the child is presented with art images in which the named colour is the dominant one. I particularly liked the uncluttered presentation and choice of art works, which ranged from the more obvious ones such as Vincent Van Gogh's 'Bouquet of Sunflowers' for the colour yellow to Craigie Aitchison's 'Goatfell, Isle of Arran' for the colour purple. The author makes no comment on the pieces and simply presents the images, allowing for a great deal of open-ended talk and discussion between parent and child or between teacher and child. My only criticism would be that the pieces presented are all either representational paintings or prints – how can you not mention Alexander Calder's mobiles when talking about red?

This little book might prove to be a valuable resource to infant teachers as they are working with children on colour identification. I can see it forming the central discussion point for colour collections where the children collect, not only coloured objects for colour tables, but also collect art images to display and possibly create their own colour collages/montages. This would be an excellent introduction for children to the second strand unit of the visual arts curriculum – looking at and responding to art.

Michael O'Reilly

Jonah Winter (Ana Juan illus)
Frida

Frances Lincoln 2005 32pp (hbk) £10.99 1845073541



I love the work of Frida Kahlo so I must admit to being slightly disappointed by this book, possibly because it did not include any actual work by the artist herself. That said, however, this

is a beautifully presented account of the life of the artist, lavishly illustrated with images based around themes from Mexican folk art, an art form on which the artist herself based much of her work.

The central message of the text is the importance of the art act to the artist. Frida Kahlo had a difficult life.

For much of her childhood she was confined to bed and spent most of her adult life in great pain as a result of a traffic accident. The book recounts how she invents an imaginary friend to keep her company while she is confined and how she used her art to paint her pain and hurt. The use of Mexican folk art in the illustrations parallels the artist's own use of the Mexican tradition of 'exvotos' – small paintings that are executed almost as prayers.

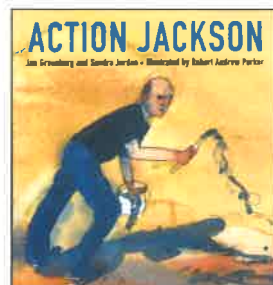
The book's main attraction lies I think in the quirky illustration style – a mixture of Kahloesque images and folk art. I could certainly see the book being used with a senior primary class as a stimulus for work in the area of looking at and responding to different art traditions from around the world.

Michael O'Reilly

Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan
(Robert Andrew Parker illus)

Action Jackson

Frances Lincoln 2005 32pp (hbk) £10.99 1845073266



There are lots of books on the shelves that present collections of art to children and that tell the life stories of artists, but few are as good as this one in that it sets out to show how an artist actually worked. I would rank this

book alongside the best series of art books for children that I know – the Prestel 'Adventures in Art' series.

The book is beautifully illustrated with watercolour paintings of daily scenes from the life of Jackson Pollock; of the artist at rest, at work and at play. The text is an excellent account of how the artist worked and of the stimuli that he used in creating his first action painting: 'Number 1: Lavender Mist' in 1951. An appendix to the text presents a simple biography of the life of the artist.

I think that this book would appeal to any who suffer from the 'I Can't Draw' complex, in that the artist moved totally away from representational work in order to produce this piece of art. Pollock himself described art as 'energy and motion made visible' and this book excellently describes his processes, how he worked and how he drew his inspiration from the work of Native American artists.

This book would make a wonderful contribution to any teacher's programme of work in the area of looking at and responding to the work of artists.

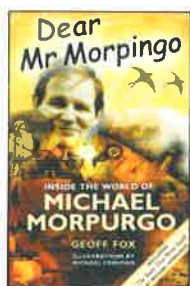
Michael O'Reilly

biography

Geoff Fox (Michael Foreman illus)

Dear Mr Morpingo

Wizard 2005 254pp (pbk) £5.99 1840466073



I will admit right off that I am not an avid 'Morpurgian' as Michael Morpurgo fans are referred to in this fascinating book. But I am only keenly aware of how many of the children in my classes, and in my school, thought him the best author they had ever read.

This book is a clever mix of biography and storytelling. Geoff Fox very cleverly tells the story of the storyteller. We are drawn into the very details of Morpurgo's early life and how this shaped the author he has become. His life as author is investigated in a way to give the child reader some insight into how the Children's Laureate goes about the business of writing. The notion of dreaming is central to this as Michael waits for various parts of the story to take shape in his head before he commits them to paper.

Each one of his books is taken and written about in the second part of the book. This I would see as being really interesting for the young reader/fan and a means of getting those not familiar with some of Michael Morpurgo's books to go and read them ... as I certainly will! Wonderful book!

Finian O'Shea

information

Ian Roberts and Brian Moses

The Second World War

David Fulton Publishers 2005 96pp (pbk) £15.00 1843121816

This book, from the Literacy Through History series, takes a variety of historical source material on the theme of wartime and develops interesting activities for primary school children which encourage

creative responses to visual and documentary sources. The book is in two parts. The first has photocopiable black and white source materials with short background notes on each and related activities set out in a double-page spread. The second section has an anthology of further materials on the war theme which teachers can use to devise activities. The evidence is mainly from newspapers and magazines of the period with some reports and interviews. Topics such as rationing and evacuation are examined and a particular emphasis is placed on linking history to literacy by encouraging reading from and writing in a range of genres. The activities also contain suggestions for co-operative type group work, which include oral work and drama.

While this book places a focus mainly on Britain during the war, the material would be of interest to primary teachers in Ireland and elsewhere. The evidence chosen is suitable in length and difficulty for senior classes within primary schools. A particular strength of this book is that much of the material is centred on children's experiences in the past, an aspect often neglected in resources published for teaching history. The sources on evacuation, school experiences and domestic life would be especially useful to help children to compare life for children then and now. They would also assist children to empathise with those who lived then and, with further research, to compare and contrast the experiences of children in Britain and Ireland during the war period. Using this book would help teachers to make the topic of war interesting. The sources provided would also help children to understand that evidence helps us to know about the past and that such evidence needs to be examined. A useful and interesting resource book for teachers of fifth and sixth classes.

Geraldine O'Connor

Paul Dowswell

The Usborne Introduction to the Second World War

Usborne 2005 128pp £12.99 (hbk) 0746062060

World War II is now understood as a 'Total War' in which the state took control of all economic, social, cultural and political resources and all sections of society, including women and children, were engaged in prosecuting war. Therefore, any history of the war would have to deal with far more than the military campaign. Although necessarily focused on

the military campaigns, this large-format and well-illustrated book does not neglect these other aspects of the war, with sections on propaganda, women and war production and the impact on children. It gives equal weight to the various theatres of the global war, noting especially the crucial Eastern Front between the Soviet Union and Germany, which only 3 per cent of Russian males between 19 and 23 survived. The text and illustrations are well integrated and make each page an attractive unit. An exciting innovation is the weblinks that accompany each page via the Usborne site. The danger of websites, apart from the obvious ones, are that much that is available is dross or even propaganda. This book's links are to good quality-sources such as Holnet and the British National Archives and significantly extend the material on the printed page. For ages 12–15 and useful in any school course on World War II.

Martin Maguire

academic

Thomas van der Walt (ed.)
(asst. Felicité Fairer-Wessels & Judith Inggs)
Change and Renewal in Children's Literature

Praeger 2004 208pp (hbk) £48.00 0275981851

Books such as this don't just map the ever-changing topics attracting the attention of critics and researchers. They take them into the yellow, as Joseph Conrad called the unmapped spaces in the African continent. And they do so with authority: a volume published under the auspices of the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL) commands the immediate attention due to an international body of scholars. The IRSCL 2001 biennial conference in South Africa addressed the topic of change and renewal in children's literature, and from the papers presented, editor Thomas van der Walt has gleaned 18 fresh, pithy essays. Each is tantalising, bringing a new perspective or new information, judiciously deploying the apparatus of literary criticism. This is a knowing book, aware of the pitfalls of academising this field. While the process contributes to the 'emancipation' of children's literature, it runs the risk also of removing the

dialogue it engenders away from the children who are the impetus for the enterprise in the first place, as van der Walt notes. The challenge, then, is to manage judiciously changing perspectives so as to renew children's literature.

And how do critics respond? Take the approaches of Victoria Flanagan and Margot Hillel to gender, a well-rehearsed, central issue. Here the emphasis is shifted from predictable delineation of gender roles to, respectively, cross-dressing in children's literature, and to the eroticised child or pubescent figure. Flanagan's conclusion, that there is an unprecedented willingness to embrace adult concepts previously considered off limits, seems applicable to both topics. David Rudd's study of Blyton's protean reinventions serves as a lesson, as does Rolf Romåren's parallel look at Tarzan – salutary or cautionary, depending on your perspective. Eva-Maria Metcalf reviews how German and Scandinavian literature promote democratic values, while Clare Bradford postcolonial exploration of Australian Aboriginal children's literature continues the political theme.

One distinct strength of this book is its range of reference. While the trajectory of English studies may currently be skewed towards former colonies (ably represented here by Antipodeans Flanagan, Hillel, Bradford and Rosemary Johnstone, and South Africans Judith Inggs, Eileen Donaldson and van der Walt), one feature of this book is the significant role played by representatives of other, traditionally non-English speaking countries with a tradition of study of children's literature. Helene Høyrup's reading of cultural concepts of childhood in Andersen is succinct and probing, as is Sirke Happonen's of Tove Jansson. Riita Oittinen, Maria Lassén-Seger, Klaus Doderer, Darja Mazi-Leskovar and Anna Karlskov Skyggebjerg make sparkling contributions to this international conversation. It's good to see Anne de Vries write on lullabies, but her essay only underlines the paucity of attention currently paid to non-fiction. There's another yellow area on the map of childlit criticism.

The juxtaposition of critical approaches and subject matter makes considerable demands on the reader, but Nancy Huse's hope, that multiple intersecting sets of discourses can be 'splendid and intriguing, empowering and puzzling', finds fulfilment in this book.

Mary Shine Thompson

Great new books for Autumn!

Enter the weird and wonderful world of
ALFIE GREEN!



SEPTEMBER

Alfie Green and the Magical Gift

Joe O'Brien

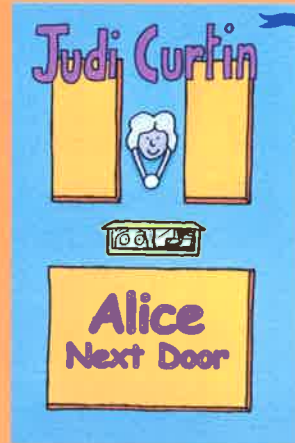
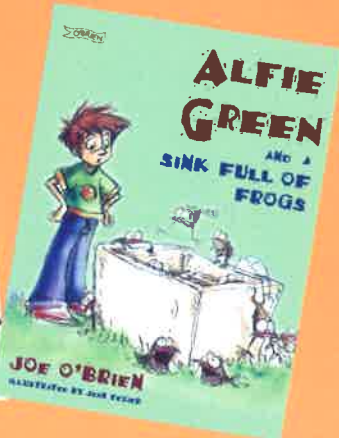
A rusty key opens a dusty box hidden in Alfie's grandad's shed. Inside is an old, old book with magical powers. The book promises Alfie a gift, but first he must take the crystal flower across Sleepy Meadows full of Snapping Dragons to the crooked tree that is guarded by Giant Hogweeds. If Alfie succeeds he will be able to do something he has never done before!

€7.95 hb, ISBN 0-86278-936-2

Alfie Green and a Sink Full of Frogs

Alfie needs help to fight off an invasion of frogs.

€7.95 hb, ISBN 0-86278-937-0



SEPTEMBER

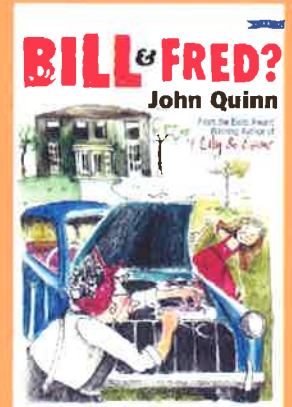
Alice Next Door

Judi Curtin

Best friends need to be together, don't they? Poor Megan! Not alone is she stuck with totally uncool parents, and a little sister who is too cute for words, but now her very best friend, Alice, has moved away. Now Megan has to go to school and face the dreaded Melissa all on her own.

The two friends hatch a risky plot to get back together. But can their secret plan work?

€7.95 pb, ISBN 0-86278-898-6



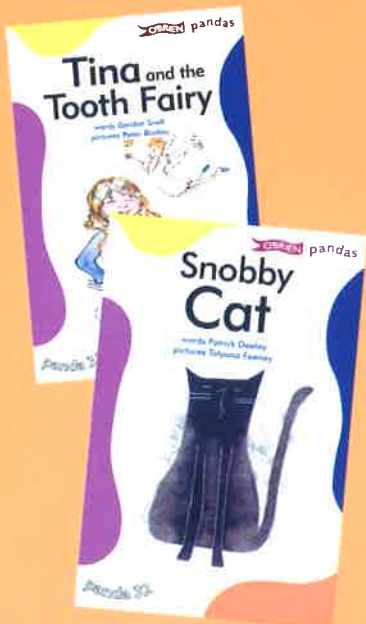
OCTOBER

Bill and Fred?

John Quinn

From the best-selling author of *The Summer of Lily and Esme* When Katie Lynch and her family are invited to Walburley Hall to meet the new owners, they are astonished to discover that their hosts, Bill and Fred, are sisters. With Katie's help, the sisters try to raise money to repair the old Hall. The prize money offered by the Grand Knockdown Charity Snooker Challenge seems like the answer, but can Fred beat Flash Fagan? And the old house has secrets of its own ...

€7.95 pb, ISBN 0-86278-915-X



AUGUST
Two NEW *pandas!*

Tina and the Tooth Fairy

Panda No. 31

Gordon Snell

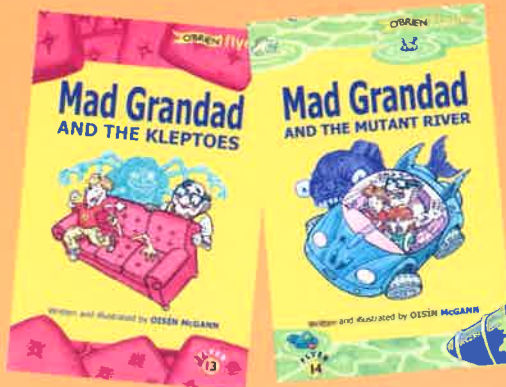
€5.95 pb, ISBN 0-86278-601-0

Snobby Cat

Panda No. 32

Patrick Deeley

€5.95 pb, ISBN 0-86278-946-X



SEPTEMBER

Two great NEW *flyers!*

Oisín McGann

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Mad Grandad and the Mutant River

€5.95 pb, ISBN 0-86278-939-7

SEPTEMBER

Mo Mhadra Beoga

Sos 12

Patrick Deeley

Ba bhreá le Jenny madra dá cuid féin. Ach is trioblóid an madra seo! Bíonn sé ag tochairt sa ghairdín i gcónaí! Bíonn sé i dtrioblóid i 'Scoil na Madraí! Cad a dhéanfaidh Jenny?

€5.95 pb

ISBN 0-86278-942-7



SEPTEMBER

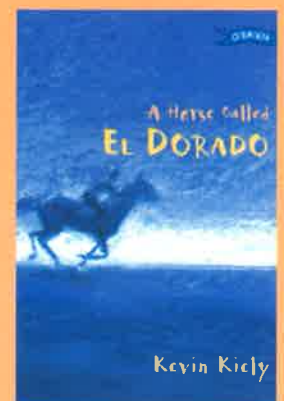
Under Fragile Stone

Oisín McGann

Vol. II of *The Archisan Tales* by Bisto Merit Award-winner Oisín McGann

Taya and Lorkrin's shape-changing Myunan tribe faces an invasion by Noran, which is intent on mining the valuable iron ore from their sacred mountain, Absaeth. But the mountain is haunted and fights back with supernatural powers. The adventure begins...

€7.95 pb, ISBN 0-86278-835-8



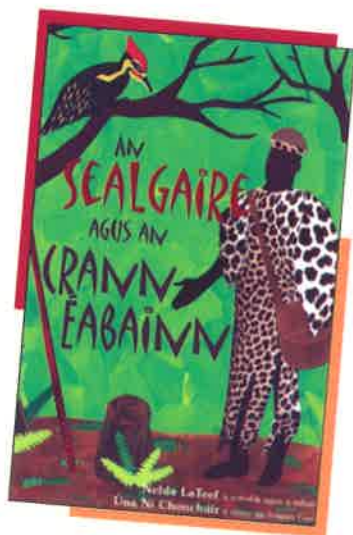
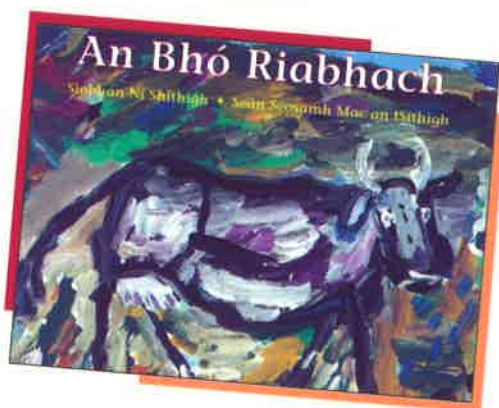
OCTOBER

A Horse Called El Dorado

Kevin Kiely

In a commune at the edge of a forest in Colombia, life is blissful until the Guerrillas come. Pepe must flee, leaving behind his horse El Dorado. His future looks grim until his Irish grandparents offer him another chance. Can Pepe go all on his own to this strange, cold land? And what future awaits him there? Will he ever have the chance to ride his beloved horses again?

€7.95 pb, ISBN 0-86278-907-9



An Bhó An Sealgaire An Crann Éabainn

An Bhó Riabhach

Siobhán Ní Shíthigh / Seán Seosamh Mac an tSíthigh

Bronnadh Gradam Eilís Dillon ar an leabhar "An Bhó Riabhach" ag ócáid fógartha Dhuaisleabhair Bhistó na bliana seo. Ar a fheabhas mar scéal agus ar an obair ealaíne ann araon a bronnadh an gradam ar an údar Siobhán Ní Shíthigh agus ar an ealaíontóir Seán Seosamh Mac an tSíthigh.

Scéal aniar chugainn as tobar an bhéaloidis is ea An Bhó Riabhach. Ach tá beocht nua curtha sa seanscéal anseo, idir insint agus ealaín, ag muintir Shíthigh. Bainfidh idir óg is aosta taitneamh as an saothar céimiúil seo. Gabhann dlúthdhiosca den scéal á léamh leis an leabhar chomh maith.

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Nelda LaTeef

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angum@forasnagaeilge.ie www.gaeilge.ie

 AN GUM



Foras na Gaeilge