



BfK Briefing ? May 1997

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NEWS

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The Big Idea

In the run-up to National Libraries Week in November libraries are inviting children from 4 to 15 to create an advertisement to persuade others to use libraries; it can take the form of a poster, a radio or tv ad or web site. The television category is being run in conjunction with **Blue Peter**. Entry forms are available from libraries or send an A5 sae to The Big Idea, c/o The Marketing Department, Library Association, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE.

For Sale: Reed Children's Books

Winnie the Pooh and Thomas the Tank Engine are two of the strong properties to which Reed Children's Book has rights. Now that Reed Elsevier has sold the trade division to Random House, an early sale of the children's division might have been expected. According to the directors it will be sold 'in due course'; meanwhile interested children's publishers continue to circle.

Public Libraries - Not Boring

The first major government review of public libraries for almost 50 years, **Reading the Future** (free from the Libraries Division, Department of National Heritage, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH) has had a mixed reception. While Ross Shimmon, chief executive of the Library Association, welcomed a government review that acknowledged the importance of public libraries to the information society, he asked where the money would come from for extended hours, better book stocks and new technology. He was also disappointed that the relationship between schools and public libraries was not addressed; the sharp demise in the school library service could not be filled entirely by public libraries which do not have the resources or staff.

Meanwhile the Policy Studies Institute's survey, **Cultural Trends**, reveals that 15 to 25-year-olds are more likely to be regular library users now than they were in 1991. Teens and young adults, despite the popular view, clearly do not find libraries or reading boring.

CONFERENCES

Where Texts and Children Meet

The Fourth Children's Literature Conference at Homerton College, Cambridge for primary and secondary teachers, librarians, publishers etc. is from 5-7th September. Workshops, seminars and entertainment. Speakers include John Agard, Anne Fine, Michael Foreman, Margaret Meek Spencer, Nicholas Tucker. Details from Morag Styles (01223 507111).

Lust for Books

The 1997 Annual Conference of the Youth Libraries Group of The Library Association, will be held at Imperial College, South Kensington, London, from 19th -21st September. Speakers include Aidan Chambers, Brian Jacques, David Lloyd of Walker Books, Kim Reynolds of the Children's Literature Research Centre, Philip Pullman, and Alec Williams of Calderdale Libraries. The conference can be attended on a residential, non-residential or daily basis. Further details and booking form from Karen Usher, 43 Hull Road, Cottingham, East Yorkshire HU16 4PN (tel/fax01482 875208, E-mail: karen@musher.demon.co.uk [2]).

APOLOGY

A technical problem when text was transferred meant that lines went missing in two places in **BfK 103**. On page 9 the final lines of Peter Hunt's article should have read:

?That may be idealistic ? but doesn't it sum up the whole business of children's books? As I said, it is impossible to agree. Good!

On page 25 the final sentence of Vee Holliday's review of **Superstructures** should have read:

?As a result, the sheer scale and magnitude of the human endeavour involved in building these impressive structures is sometimes lost in the process.

VH?

Our apologies to Peter Hunt, Vee Holliday and to you, the reader.

PEOPLE

Valerie Fea, who received the MBE in the new year's Honours Lists, is retiring after eleven years as executive secretary of the School Library Association. Her successor is **Kathy Lemaire**, formerly Principal Librarian of Resource plus, Oxfordshire School Library Service and currently Library Adviser for the Oxfordshire LEA.

Serving on the Carnegie and Greenaway Selection Panel for 1997 are children's librarians **Dorothy Porter** (East Midlands), **Dorne Fraser** (Eastern), **Margaret Sparks** (London and South East), **Tracey Stirrup** (North West), **Liz Bowe** (Northern), **Pat Jordan** (Northern Ireland), **Margaret Patterson** (Scotland), **Lucy Squires** (South West), **Margaret Woodcock** (Yorkshire), **Julia Greenway** (Wales) and **Sheridan Hunt** (West Midlands). As was the case last year, an all female panel; it will be chaired by **Lesley Sim**.

In a surprise move, **Louis Baum** of the **Bookseller** has replaced children's book expert **Julia Eccleshare**, the organ's freelance children's book correspondent for the last five years, with a staff member new to children's books.

Ian Craig, creative director and deputy managing director of the children's division at HarperCollins, has left the company. Recently appointed divisional managing director **Colin Clarke** is putting plans to reduce the forward publishing programme into effect. Agents report a number of contracts cancelled.

Contributors: BfK team, Keith Barker

OBITUARY

Revd Wilbert Awdry

(1911-1997)

The author of the much loved 'Railway Series' of books about Thomas the Tank Engine and his fellow locomotives, the

Revd Wilbert Awdry acquired his interest in railways as a child from his father, also a vicar. When the family moved to a house 200 yards from the Great Western Railways, the young Wilbert would lie in bed listening to the engines and imagining what they might be saying to each other. These stories were later told to amuse Wilbert's son, Christopher, ill with measles. The first book, **The Three Railway Engines** (1945), resulted, the trains depicted with the expressive faces that were to become a characteristic of the series.

'Railway Series' stories, which are all based on facts to do with trains and railways, contain skilfully differentiated characters (e.g. Gordon the boastful bully) and frequently present little homilies ('pride comes before a fall' etc.); a boastful train is sure to fail in its endeavours. After the nationalisation of the railways, the Fat Director became the Fat Controller; more recent privatisations do not appear to have impinged on what are now classic texts. In recent years the series has been extensively exploited commercially with a plethora of face flannels, night lights, duvet covers and a television adaptation.

PRIZES

Melvin Burgess' Junk (Andersen/Penguin), a complex and harrowing story about young people in the grip of drug addiction, has won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize (see review p. 27). It was described as a 'provocative, purposeful novel' by chair of judges Joanna Carey who was joined on the panel by poet and novelist **Helen Dunmore**, writer **Janni Hawker**, last year's winner **Philip Pullman** and lecturer **Nicholas Tucker**. The other shortlisted books were **Creepers** by **Keith Gray** (Mammoth), **The Trokeville Way** by **Russell Hoban** (Cape), **The Fated Sky** by **Henrietta Branford** (Hodder), **Love. In Cyberia** by **Chloe Rayban** (The Bodley Head), **The Butterfly Lion** by **Michael Murpurgo** (HarperCollins) and **Johnny and the Bomb** by **Terry Pratchett** (Transworld).

The **Times Educational Supplement** Junior Information Book Award has been won by a 'clever yet simple' book in which 'lots of disciplines come together including geology, history and technology'. It is **What's Under the Bed?** by **Mick Manning** and **Brita Granstrom** (Franklin Watts). The judges were headteacher **Paul Noble**, advisory teacher **Tom Deveson** and tutor in education **Mary Jane Drummond**.

The Senior Information Book Award was won by the 'readable and enjoyable' **The World of Shakespeare** by **Anna Claybourne** and **Rebecca Treays** (Usborne) which 'would be invaluable ... to deepen understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare'. The judges were adviser **Mark Williamson**, departmental head **Lynne Marjoram** and deputy head **Andy Schofield**.

A prestigious new prize, The UNESCO Prize for Children's and Young People's Literature in the Service of Tolerance, has been awarded to **Kathryn Cave** and **Chris Riddell's** outstanding picture book with acceptance of difference as its theme-**Something Else** (Viking/Puffin).

On the shortlist for the 1997 Books for Children Mother Goose Award (for a first major illustrated book) are **Richard Kidd's Almost Famous Daisy** (Frances Lincoln), **Clare Jarrett's Catherine and the Lion** (HarperCollins), **lemma and Tiphonie Beeke's The Brand New Creature** (Levinson Books) and **Nick Marland's Welcome Night** (Cambridge University Press). The winner will be announced in May.

On the shortlist for the 1997 Junior Rhone-Poulenc Prize (for popular science books for the non-specialist reader) are **Miles Litvinoff's Atlas of Earthcare** (Gaia Books), **Caroline Young's The Big Bug Search** (Usborne), **Nick Arnold's Blood, Bones and Body Bits** and **Ugly Bugs** (both Scholastic Horrible Science series), **Nicholas Harris, Joanna Turner** and **Dr Trevor Day's The Incredible Journey to the Centre of the Atom** (Kingfisher) and **John Farndon's What Happens When...** (Macdonald). Selected by broadcaster **Carol Vorderman** (Chair), **Jill Burrige** of **Treasure Islands**, **Professor Richard Gregory** of Bristol University, **Anthony Richards** of the Science Museum and primary school teacher **Debi Kirk**, this shortlist will now be handed to junior panels in nineteen schools who will choose the winner.

BOOKS FOR STUDENTS

NEWER FANTASY BEST SELLER CHARTS

TOP 10 LISTINGS INTO SCHOOL BOOKSHOPS

JANUARY TO MARCH 1997

1. **All Because of Jackson**, Dick King-Smith, Young Corgi
2. **The Terrible Trins**, Dick King-Smith, Puffin
3. **The Ghost Teacher**, Tony Bradman, Corgi Pups
4. **Jack***, B Nadler, Puffin
5. **The Firework-Maker's Daughter**, Philip Pullman, Yearling
6. **Hogsel and Gruntel**, Dick King-Smith, Gollancz
7. **King of the Dark Tower**, Alan Brown, Hodder
8. **Little Wolf's Book of Badness**, Ian Whybrow, Collins
9. **Dreamboat Zing**, Philip Ridley, Puffin
10. **Pinocchio: The Novelization***, J J Gardner, Puffin

*Film Tie In

This 'newer fantasy' listing of recently published titles has been specially compiled by **Books for Students** from their sales data. **Books for Students Ltd** is a major specialist supply company to schools and libraries and the organiser of Readathon in schools.

PUBLICATIONS

The Children's Book Handbook (Young Book Trust, 0 85353 459 4, £6.99) lists organisations, publications, prizes etc. to do with every aspect of children and books. From Book Trust, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

The Signal Companion (Thimble Press, 0 903355 48 5, £16.50) prepared by Elaine Moss and Nancy Chambers is a classified guide to the articles which have been published in **Signal** magazine since its first publication in 1970. Grouped under such headings as Classroom Use of Books, Learning to Read, Authors and Writing etc., this is an invaluable guide to twenty-five **Signal** years. From The Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, Woodchester, Stroud, Glos GL5 5EQ.

The Other Languages: a guide to multilingual classrooms (Reading and Language Information Centre, 0 7049 1065 9, £5.95) by Viv Edwards provides information on the linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds of children whose first languages are those most commonly spoken by children in British schools (from Arabic to Yoruba). An essential and practical guide. From the Reading and Language Information Centre, The University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading RG6 1HY. Cheques payable to 'The University of Reading'.

Children's Braille Books (National Library for the Blind, free) is an updated catalogue of children's titles available including recent fiction and new science and history titles. Available in braille, in print and on disc from NLB, Cromwell Road. Bredbury. Stockport. Cheshire SK6 2SG.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Book Fairs - a Circumscribed Range?

Dear Editor

I would like to respond to a couple of points raised in your March editorial. You suggest that the 'range of titles available at book fairs is already circumscribed'. This must be a matter for subjective definition and in any sales outlet - bookshop, club or fair - the choice of product will be driven or 'circumscribed' by the customers that the outlet seeks to serve. It is a strong principle at Scholastic Book Fairs that we offer a broad range of titles from across the spectrum of children's publishers, and certainly our editorial team spend a lot of time meeting suppliers and discussing new titles. Whilst there is obviously very close contact with our colleagues in Scholastic Children's Books, there are many other suppliers with whom the book fair product team have strong and enduring relationships. Success in the book fair business stands or falls on the quality of the book selection and, therefore, it is not in our interest to exclude good children's fiction to simply support our own trade publishing.

In answer to the specific point raised by Adèle Geras concerning author visits, it is not practical for us to support one-off visits unless the title is part of our stock range, which we revise each term. We offer schools a high commission rate on book sales, schools can often take one book for every two sold. We do not buy our books on sale or return, and therefore we cannot commit to small quantities of extra titles on an ad hoc basis.

You will be aware that we have been reorganising our book fair business; one major benefit will be the scope to focus more resources on offering a better service to schools. This will include a broader choice of product, and a facility for the teacher organiser to select some of the books that the school receives. We see an open editorial policy and the best possible service to schools as critical to our success.

William Oldham

Managing Director, Book Fair Division, Scholastic Ltd

Dear Editor

School book fairs are only one means of selling books in schools. Most school librarians will have contacts through book suppliers, book representatives, or local Education Library Services and could arrange for a whole variety of different books to be sold when necessary.

I wouldn't dream of inviting an author to the school without ensuring that (a) additional books by the author were available for loan from the library and (b) books were available for sale. To have a book personally signed by an author adds to the occasion and provides great excitement for pupils and staff!

Sue Wood

Librarian, Weaverham High School, Lime Avenue, Weaverham, Cheshire CW8 3HT

Dear Editor

The 'deprofessionalisation' of book provision to which you refer in your editorial (**BfK 103**) takes no account of the independent children's booksellers who need to stay profitable to survive, yet who risk the kind of deep stocking which allows children to choose from the range they deserve. I understand that we are now an endangered species (*The Independent*, 29.3.97), yet who can blame schools for choosing School Book Fairs, for example, as their supplier when education is now profit-orientated?

The situation Adèle Geras highlights is not new though it needs to be addressed, because the influence of organisations such as School Book Fairs can only grow as their near monopoly of this sector of book supply increases. Not only authors and the children they meet in schools come under this influence - many parents consider it is a school's moral responsibility to ensure that books which some of them consider unsuitable for their seven-year-olds, e.g. Goosebumps,

should not be made available at a school book event. Yet who can blame a school for opting for School Book Fairs over any other book supplier? I, for one, cannot match their huge discounts and government money now dictates that schools should themselves operate with an eye on the profit motive.

My advice to Adèle Geras would be to try and ensure that the school approaches their nearest independent specialist or one of the more numerous chains to supply her books on a sale or return basis, provided they are willing to trade with the enemy, so to speak (I have done this in the past, but then I'm not proud!). It can happen that a school is genuinely unaware of the rules of the game, but teachers need to understand the politics behind book supply if children are not to be disappointed and discouraged from experimenting beyond the safety of currently popular series.

Jenny Morris

The Lion & Unicorn Bookshop, 19 King Street, Richmond upon Thames, Surrey TW9 IND

Helpful League Tables?

Dear Editor

What a wonder your Star Rating for books is. Like those helpful league tables for schools and those nice prescribed reading lists. Of course I shan't bother with anything less than a three-star book ? certainly not one of those ?sad? one-star books. Like Peter Hunt (**BfK**, March 97), I want to know what a ?good? book is. No more doubts now, thanks to your ?experts?.

Authors really must ?try harder? and aim for those five stars. Standard Attainment Targets for children?s authors too, why not? (Limit your answers to one side of A4 please.)

Pat Moon

Norwich

Hardback Reviews

Dear Editor

I was pleased to see a few more reviews of hardback books in your recent issues. We are a large international primary school of 30 classes and 35 nationalities, based on two sites, with two libraries, both with full-time librarians. I try to stock our libraries predominantly with hardbacks rather than paperbacks. The climate here is not very suitable for the long-term preservation of paperbacks as they deteriorate in the high humidity.

Colin Page

Deputy Principal, Kowloon Junior School, 20 Perth Street, Homantin, Kowloon, Hong Kong

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