



A Punishment to Fit the Crime? | A Right to Die? | A Right to Smoke? | Rights for Animals?

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News & Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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I generally prefer the description 'information book' to 'non-fiction'. However, with this 'Viewpoints' series, 'non-fiction' fits the bill exactly, for whatever else this quartet may be, they do not qualify as information books.

Each volume observes the same formula - a contentious subject chopped into 13 picturesque double-spread issues each hung about with emotive sound - and sight - bites, the whole set into some sort of sequence by the authorial equivalent of quick-drying cement. An example may help. In **Rights for Animals?** we have a spread entitled 'Kill or Cure?' which is devoted to the use of animals in medical research. Five italicised quotes with sources ranging from Charles Darwin to the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection establish pro and anti viewpoints, with a semi-explanatory 'text' shoehorned in between them and 'illustrated' by three photographs whose relevance has to be explained by captions. Despite all this effort, the spread comes to no serious conclusion.

The aim, of course, is transparently well-intentioned - to shock, jolt, amaze, emote or otherwise stimulate the formation of young people's own opinions and motivate discussion, debate and a further exploration of the subject leading to the holy grail of 'a better understanding'. The trouble is, though, that although there are shocks, jolts and emotions a-plenty, the books don't offer anything like enough stimulation or support for further research; in fact the nearest each book comes to this is a few 'useful addresses' and a half-page of 'Facts to think about' (it takes longer to train a kosher butcher than a doctor!).

Thus the series runs the risk of defeating its own object in that, by being deliberately inconclusive, its titles may serve only to confirm any prejudice with which readers initially approach them.

The series has no bibliography to substantiate its snatched quotes and authorial assertions - this amounts to near criminal negligence and, had **A Punishment to Fit the Crime?** equipped me so to think, I would sentence **Rights for Animals** to instant remaindering.

Running Order:

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