



BfK Briefing - July 2005

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NEWS <!--break-->

* Susan Horsham, Candice Barrett and Rosemary Woodman are the winners of the BfK online survey draw. They each receive a year's free subscription to **BfK**. Thanks to everyone who filled in the survey questionnaire.

* The top five bestselling children's books of 2004, according to research carried out by Alex Hamilton and published in the **Bookseller** (April '05), were (1) Mark Haddon's **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time** (2) J K Rowling's **Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix** (and other Potter titles) (3) **The Cat in the Hat** (and other Dr Seuss titles) (4) **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** and other Dahl titles and (5) Jennifer Donnelly's **A Gathering Light**.

* Thousands of reviews (at the time of writing 6,899!) from schools and reading groups shadowing the CILIP Carnegie/Greenaway shortlists have been posted on www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk [2] demonstrating the intense interest amongst young readers generated by the UK's premier children's book awards.

PEOPLE

Congratulations to **Jacqueline Wilson OBE** who has been appointed the fourth Children's Laureate. Wilson has won many awards including the Smarties Prize, and the Children's Book Award. **The Illustrated Mum** won the Guardian Children's Fiction Award, the Children's Book of the Year at the British Book Awards and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year in 1999. **Girls in Tears** won the Children's Book of the Year Award in 2003. **The Story of Tracy Beaker** won the 2002 Blue Peter People's Choice Award. Jacqueline Wilson was recently found to be the most borrowed author in UK libraries for the second year running.

LETTERS TO THE DITOR

Dear Editor

Reading the magazine (**BfK** No. 152) and looking at the Reviews, I just had to let you know that **The Lady Grace Mysteries** (**Assassin** , **Betrayal** , **Conspiracy** and **Deception**) have been greeted in the library here with a resounding GREAT BOOKS. Having read **Assassin** (the first) the girls just had to go on to read the others. The next title, **Exile** , is due out this month and of course, it's on order. Highly recommended, even by the senior library.

Jan Heaver

Sacred Heart Convent School, Swaffham

Dear Editor

I felt I had to respond to the recent review by Margaret Mallett of my book **Boy** (**BfK** No. 150), not because of the low star rating, but because I think it raises a point that invites discussion. Firstly I am mystified as to why a work of fiction is classified as an information book, which it quite clearly is not. The book makes no such claim. Perhaps this misguided classification explains why MM, despite her kind words on the structure and the quality of the illustrations, seems so hung up on the inclusion of a dinosaur in a stone age story.

This is hardly a unique idea, nor was it undertaken lightly by myself or the publisher. But I remember how, as a child, I would feel a great wave of disappointment if no dinosaurs appeared in prehistoric tales of early man. The whole point of fiction is that you can imagine 'what if?'. If we are denied that, what then?

MM claims that 'you cannot start too soon to help children understand the sequence in which life appeared on earth.' I would counter-claim that you cannot start too soon to help children understand the pleasure of using their imaginations. Whatever happened to good old-fashioned fun? I suppose it's just not fashionable in educational circles these days.

Not everyone wants to be a scientist or an academic. For those who do, I have found the very inconsistency of the world inhabited by my **Boy** to be a good springboard for discussion in the classroom. But some children need to imagine things, to daydream. I certainly did. It didn't make me a brilliant student of palaeontology, but it didn't lessen my ability to grasp facts either. And now ' I still understand the pleasure of using my imagination. Indeed I daydream for a profession.

Some children need a little wish fulfilled in a book sometimes, and if it's as innocent as a glimpse of an inauthentically placed dinosaur, then so be it! And, by the way, I think two stars was rather stingy.

James Mayhew

48 Meadow Way, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 3HX

Margaret Mallett writes: **Boy** with its cave painting end pages and vivid pictures of a prehistoric environment struck me as being an 'information story' inviting speculation about what life might have been like for a young cave boy. The 'information story' is a well established genre for young children and while the best are certainly imagination stretching and sometimes playful, they do (unlike the conventional story) have to take some account of present scientific and archeological knowledge. But perhaps two stars was a bit meagre as, in spite of the 'inaauthentically placed dinosaur', this is still an original and exciting picture book likely to appeal to the very young.

COMPETITION

HarperCollins, in association with **Saga** magazine, has launched a nationwide competition to discover a new author talent in the world of children's books. Ambitious, unpublished writers over 50 are asked to write a book aimed at the core children's reading age, 8-14, with the chosen writer winning the reward of having their work published by HarperCollins Children's Books. The May issue of **Saga** magazine published the first of a series of 'Masterclasses' on writing for children. Contributors to the series include Michael Morpurgo, Garth Nix, Diana Wynne Jones, Lynne Reid Banks and Katherine Langrish. The authors will focus on the importance of four key editorial points, supported by recommended reading lists. For competition rules, and detailed terms and conditions of entry, check www.saga.co.uk/magazine [3]

EVENT

35th Celebratory Birthday Conference of the quarterly journal, **Children's Literature in Education**

Saturday, 3 September at the Trent Park Campus, Middlesex University

Looking back over 35 years of children's books, speculating about the future and ? well ? celebrating. Speakers include Victoria de Rijke, Chris Hall, Margaret Mackey, Mike Rosen, David Rudd, Posy Simmonds and Nick Tucker with a team of celebrity readers and, probably, children. Details from: Carolyn Pitkin, School of Lifelong Learning and Education, Middlesex University, Trent Park Campus, Bramley Road, London N14 4XS, telephone: (0)20 8411 6363, email: c.pitkin@mdx.ac.uk

Obituary

Valerie Alderson (1931-2005)

Pat Garrett writes?

Valerie Alderson died on 12 April at the age of 74. She was born in Bristol, and, after a rather restricted childhood, went to Exeter University to read Biology, where she met her future husband, Brian. After they married they both worked briefly for Simpkin & Marshall, and other book-related employers. She was involved with books, and children's books in particular, for the rest of her life.

From 1970 to 1976 she edited and published the magazine **Children's Book Review** under the imprint Five Owls Press; under this imprint she also published the important bibliographies of Sidney Roscoe's John Newbery and Marjorie Moon's John Harris. When they moved from Hertfordshire to Richmond, N. Yorkshire, she managed the Five Owls Bookshop there for fifteen years. She was an extremely able manager, editor, writer and critic, yet was not often given the credit she deserved, so often overshadowed, but not intentionally, by Brian.

She collected areas that interested her, notably medical history, cookery and gardening. She became fascinated by the Victorian and Edwardian periodicals of which she had many. Her interest in Louisa M Alcott led to her editing **Little Women** for OUP's World's Classics series. She was an extremely good cook, a devotee of both Mrs and Mr Beeton, and enjoyed gardening. Unfortunately the lack of a garden in Richmond led to her doing as much container gardening as she could. Her diabetes led to her increasing restriction, and she died of a sequence of severe heart attacks. She is survived by her husband, three of her five sons, and two granddaughters.

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