



Editor's Page ? March 1988

Article Author:

[Pat Triggs](#) [1]

[49](#) [2]

Article Category:

Editorial

Byline:

News and comment from the Editor.

Suddenly publishing has discovered teenagers in a big way. For 20 years publishers, critics, teachers, have kicked around the concept of the teenage book: Do we need it? What should it be about? Are there limits to what it contains, how it is written? What distinguishes it from a children's book - or an adult book? For booksellers and librarians the discussion has also frequently been practically focused. Where to put them? How to sell or shelve them'?

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Now, it seems, the book world is ready to have teenagers as a segment of the market. New imprints are appearing, distinctively packaged and with specially designed logos. Booksellers are creating Teenage sections. At the same time changes in syllabuses for the GCSE provide opportunities for 'Wider Reading' in courses that go way beyond the traditional five set texts. 'It's heady, exciting and intoxicating stuff,' wrote Val Randall, one of our reviewers, 'but there's more to doing it properly than might appear.' We decided to put some of the new teenage series to the test in the context of GCSE. Val was keen to be involved ('anything to get hold of more books!') and to contrast with her northern outpost school we found one in the centre of a southern city with an equally enthusiastic Head of English. Publishers kindly cooperated by supplying books for the investigation. You can read what happened and what the testers made of the books in a special four-page feature (pages 4-7).

Meanwhile the Methuen Teen collection is developing a hardback section. Four titles launch the series in March: two are transatlantic imports- Monica Hughes' **Spirit River** and Caroline Cooney's **Don't Blame the Music**; two are originals - Denis Bond's **Rough Mix** has a pop-music background, Anthony Horowitz's **Groosham Grange** is in the humorous horror category. Priced at £7.50 -£8.50, these are out of the question for tight English Department budgets. We're increasingly dependent on libraries for keeping hardback (or expensive trade paperback) publishing economically viable and it's a vital area of publishing to preserve for here lies the editorial experience that, at its best, nourishes new writers. Writers like Rex Harley published by Gollancz (a trail-blazing imprint in teenage fiction) whose first full-length novel has just come out. **Black November** (0 575 04150 1, £7.95) is a tense, literate thriller, a really good read.

Cover Story

Margaret Clark is one of those talented and experienced editors. At The Bodley Head she has been grappling with the complexities of publishing for teenagers since the beginning. In a fascinating article (page 10) she looks back to the first British publication of Zindel's **The Pigman** in 1969 and considers developments since that particular watershed. Margaret is well aware that the £4.50 price tag on current Bodley Head Paperback Originals is more than most schools are able to pay. She is also wary of teenage series identity. (Interesting that a third of Val Randall's test readers agree with her about this.) And so the latest Jan Mark **Enough is Too Much Already**, published in April and featured on our cover, will sell at a welcome and amazing £2.95 but appear probably as a one-off and not part of a named series.

Maurice, Nazzer and Nina, the three characters whose conversation and storytelling are the stuff of this volume first

appeared in **Feet** (Kestrel/Puffin). The title story is taken from that collection and two more are from other Bodley Head collections. Four new stories complete this very accomplished and engaging set.

Promotional Literature?

Jan Mark has dedicated **Enough is Too Much Already** to Aidan Chambers, editor of **A Sporting Chance** and **A Quiver of Ghosts**, the anthologies for which two of the stories were first commissioned. Aidan of course is also a significant figure in teenage reading: as editor of the paperback Topliner series, he was responsible for making writers like Zindel easily available to schools; and as a writer he has extended the scope of teenage fiction by experimenting with narrative forms and taking on 'difficult' subjects.

The 'difficult' subject of homosexual love - so well dealt with in recent years by a number of writers, including Aidan Chambers - will become even more problematic for publishers, teachers and librarians if Clause 28 goes through Parliament unamended. Will providing books which present homosexual relationships as 'normal' constitute 'promoting homosexuality'? What a pity if this crass legislation should prevent readers responding, as did one of Val Randall's pupils, to Rhodri Jones's **Different Friends** - a story about the nature of all kinds of love based on real incidents. In a long and very well considered review this reader writes, 'I enjoyed this book mainly because the author tried to grasp a very sensitive topic like homosexuality, and love, and explained it in a tactful way. I realised the difficulties of being homosexual. The things that they have to fight against.' I'd call that promoting understanding. I'm afraid that legislation by its nature will fail to be so sensitive.

Thank you, Hampshire

Understanding and accepting your own feelings is now a recognised aspect of Health Education - an acknowledgement of the impossibility of totally separating mind and body. It's good to see new titles dealing with Health Education for the primary school. John Dunne's team of school librarians in Hampshire helped us to sort out those to be particularly recommended (see Information Please, page 24). Their listings and annotations ended with a note: 'Don't forget how useful fiction can be for Health Education - there's a lot to talk about in **The Very Hungry Caterpillar**, for instance!' A characteristic reminder from a Library Service which is providing such excellent support for teachers in First schools who have opted for an approach to reading that no longer relies on reading schemes.

I spent a day recently with 22 of those teachers. I wish I had had the Chief Education Officer from Bromley with me to see how thoroughly these teachers understood what they were doing, how carefully thought out their approach, how systematic their attention to development. Far more sensitive to individual children's needs than taking them through stage after stage of disposable books in a sequence determined by a publisher who has never set eyes on them. Far more demanding though of a teacher's professional skills. But these teachers were enjoying the challenge, understood the pitfalls, were supporting each other and relishing the results - seeing children developing as readers and writers and with a positive enthusiasm for both activities. Reading about Bromley in the TES had made me angry and depressed. My day in Hampshire was just what was needed.

Thank you, Hampshire.

Pat

Page Number:

3

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