



Editor's Page - January 1988

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News and comment from the Editor.

Welcome to the first **BfK** of 1988 - the year of the GERBIL. Testing times lie ahead (in every sense); and it's an interesting start when Headmaster Ken sends two of his curriculum working parties back to do their homework again until they get the answers right. Meanwhile *we've* got something for everyone concerned with developing literacy through involvement with genuine reading experiences: a classic revisited, a suggestion for GCSE, some thoughts on adaptation, a look at the latest series for the 'newly independent', a profile of a writer who, under two names, spans the whole age range and, of course, all the latest news, reviews, and information.

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Two-faced writer?

Martin Waddell, featured in this issue's Authorgraph (page 12) is certainly a writer with something for everyone, whether under his own name or as Catherine Sefton, his fictional alter ego. I've seen many young readers 'take off' on the 'Harriet' stories (Waddell) or **The Ghost and Bertie Boggin** (Sefton); teenagers who have read **Starry Night** and now understand feelingly the complexity of the situation in Northern Ireland will be eager to get their hands on **Frankie's Story**, the second in this three-book sequence. And I'm constantly delighted by children who show me the variety of 'reading lessons' contained within **Going West**, a brilliant picture book collaboration with Philippe Dupasquier which has a short but deceptively simple Waddell text.

Liz Weir, Belfast Children's Librarian, had barely recovered from organising a highly successful Children's Book Week when she went to talk to Martin Waddell for us. While she was there, a group of local children arrived to talk books. They didn't go away empty handed. 'I can't wait to get started on this one,' said one as they left. Could there be a better recommendation?

Jumping off points

In search of other writers to take children beyond beginning reading, I took some new titles into classes of first and second-year juniors. You can find out what they made of them on page 8. Good news for readers a little nearer the start of the journey through literacy is that Walker's **Red Nose Readers**, the brilliant Ahlberg/McNaughton collaboration, are now going into paperback at only 99p each. And from Viking Kestrel we are promised a new series of Allan Ahlberg's **Happy Families**. Developing readers have always learned a lot about reading from comics. **JUMP!**, a new monthly magazine for 4-8 year olds, has a comic strip. It also has stories, poems, feature articles, things to do and competitions. The literary content is good; material is often reprinted or extracted from already published books so, if there is a positive response, parents sharp enough to read the small print will know where to go for more. There is also a centre pull-out section for parents (**High-Jump**) in which Julia Eccleshare has a regular book news feature.

JUMP! of course has a club for children to join. Another club, at one time the meeting place for the juvenile literati, is

undergoing yet more changes. The Puffin Club has merged with the Puffin School Book Club bookselling operation. Schools joining the new age-ranged bookselling schemes will be eligible to receive the (now two) club magazines - free to teachers, 30p to pupils. **Puffin Post** now caters for 9-13 year olds, **Puffin Flight** for 6-9s. For those under 6, there is Fledgling.

Distance learning

With the GERBIL upon us (and so many books to choose from) it's a good time to remind ourselves (or begin to ask ourselves) what we think reading is all about. To help with this comes a very welcome and timely booklet from Signal. In **How Texts Teach What Readers Learn** (0 913355 23 X, £2.50), Margaret Meek offers 'a workshop rather than an essay'. Anyone who hasn't been lucky enough to attend a workshop led by Margaret can now enjoy the benefits of her teaching in 40 very readable pages. She focuses our attention on the idea that readers do different things with different texts, that reading 'doesn't happen in a vacuum. The social conditions and surroundings are important too.' Looking closely at texts/books by John Burningham, Shirley Hughes, the Ahlbergs, Jan Mark and others, she reveals the argument persuasively and accessibly. She concludes 'strange as it may seem, the reading of stories makes skilful powerful readers who come to understand not only the meaning but also the force of texts. It is a strong defence against being victimised by the reductive powers of so-called "functional literacy". It also makes writers.' Those of us seeking to divert the advance of reductive forms of assessment could find this booklet a valuable ally and good recruiting material. (Available from the Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL5 5EQ)

May we recommend

Short stories, as Margaret Meek shows with Jan Mark's **William's Story**, can provide ideal texts for readers to grow on. Richard Brown and Glenys Willars have compiled a very well annotated select list: **Short Stories for Children** (Youth Libraries Group, 0 946 58107 X. £3.00 - from Maggie Norwood, YLG, Central Children's Library, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3HQ). All ages, but strongest in the Junior/Middle range.

For the teenage end of the spectrum Patricia Crampton makes a case for a novel, **No Hero for the Kaiser** (page 22). Patricia is the translator of Rudolf Frank's powerful story - though you won't find her name on the title page of the paperback edition from Swallow where it has been for some inexplicable reason omitted. Strange behaviour from a publisher doing such good work ensuring a paperback presence for titles others might class as uncommercial. Other recommendations for the Young Adults section of public (or school) libraries can be found in **The Right Stuff**, compiled by Margaret Marshall for the YLG (0 946 58106 1, £3.50). And for a voice that really sounds as if it knows its books and its readers, my accolade goes to Bromley Libraries for **The Second Toe-Curling, Spine-Chilling, Heart-Stopping, Tear-Jerking, Hair-Raising, Rib-Tickling, Nail-Biting Teenage Book List**. 68 entries with just the right kind of annotations. To obtain a copy, send a stamped (13p), self-addressed A5 envelope to, The Youth Librarian, Central Library, High Street, Bromley, Kent BR1 1EX.

The Literature curriculum in secondary English is certainly widening as a result of developments in the GCSE. Needing background information on authors, wise teachers and librarians have been turning to **BfK** for one-off copies of Authorgraphs and other material. We have upwards of 30 items of interest. Contact us for details.

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