

Going Solo

Mad Iris Goes Missing

Written by Jeremy Strong
Illustrated by Scoular Anderson
Barrington Stoke £4.99
ISBN: 1 842993 65 8



Not every school has an ostrich for a mascot! Students at Pudding Lane Primary all love Mad Iris, but things start to go badly wrong when she goes missing. How can the children win their football match against Top End Primary without her? When Ross and Katie hatch a plan to find her, events take an unexpected turn. The comical text is enhanced by exuberant drawings which add momentum to a funny story that will appeal to all developing readers.

Marianne Adey

The Children Who Smelled a Rat



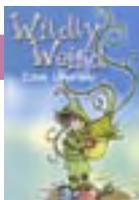
Written by Allan Ahlberg
Illustrated by Katherine McEwen
Walker Books £5.99
ISBN: 1 4063 0134 5

If we were to form a Magic Circle of Story Makers, Allan Ahlberg would be a founder member. His work is as far away from the arid world of Synthetic Phonics (a tautology in itself) as it's possible to be, and this story epitomises his magicianship. To start with, it isn't just one tale, but several, which stop and start, overlap, bump into each other, go off at a tangent and finally come together in a gloriously satisfying way. And if you add into the mix, cunning footnotes, mini reviews, superfluties which bring a smile, and directional arrows to guide the observer, you end up with a glorious anarchic model for the young reader/writer to puzzle over. Excellent for children early in their school career.

Jack Ousbey

Wildly Weird

Written by Kaye Umansky
Illustrated by Chris Mould
Barrington Stoke £4.99
ISBN: 1 842993 66 6



Another amusing story about the Weirds who live next door to the Primms. Two families who couldn't be more different: the Primms are conventionally in favour of a 'tidy life' with no sudden shocks or dramas but plenty of homework, cream carpets, salads and 'sprout surprise'. Their neighbours, meanwhile, are free spirits with an eccentric inventor as the head of the household and a stuntwoman for his wife. They live on junk food and try to divert, particularly Oliver, from doing too much homework! Against Mrs Primm's wishes, Pinchton Primm can't help but have fascination for, and fun with, each and all of the Weirds - not forgetting their large and curly

houseplant. This is Kaye Umansky's wacky humour in peak form. No-one is able to stifle a giggle or look at houseplants quite in the same way again.

Gill Roberts

Doodlebug Summer

Written by Alison Prince
A & C Black Flashbacks
£4.99 ISBN: 0 7136 7579 9



Inside this slim volume with its inviting, fire-lit cover, lies a perfect war story. Alison Prince writes from the selective, half-understood perspective of an intelligent child absorbing and normalising war; on your doorstep, in your garden, smashing windows, and, finally, destroying your house and your Mum. Doodle bugs sound playful and people listening to their curious, tractor-like sound can dismiss them as passing rockets - until a roof blows off and flames engulf the whole street. The matter-of-fact delivery here never overstates, but conveys clearly the awkward guilt children faced frequently during World War II. The glossary and historical notes at the end are useful and the book is highly recommended.

Tina Massey

Don't Look Back!

Written by Steve Barlow & Steve Skidmore
Barn Owl Books £4.99 ISBN: 1 9030 15 57 X



If you want to encourage younger children to explore the Greek tales, there's no better introduction than the Two Steves' hilarious series of *Mad Myths*. As in all the best books the facts are accurate, if a little embellished!

Take this one - Well'ard, Eddie, Andy and Perce (short for Pricilla) go on a trip to London to take in the National Gallery, but become separated and find themselves in the Underground listening to terrible sounds which turn out to be produced by Orpheus, who's turned busker. He's still searching for his lost love, Eurydice, so the foursome decide to help by travelling on the underground trains to the Underworld where they meet the usual suspects from Charon to Cerberus. The jokes are as old as the hills, the plot is based on the real myths - sort of! - and the whole a hugely entertaining romp through an ancient and brilliant story. And there's more - collect all four titles and enjoy.

Valerie Bierman

Christophe's Story

Written by Nicki Cornwell
Illustrated by Karin Littlewood
Frances Lincoln £4.99
ISBN: 1 84507 521 8



Special needs and special talents lie at the heart of this easily accessible short novel. Christophe is struggling to cope with a new country, a new school and a new language. His

story slowly emerges and unfolds, touching upon issues but never preaching, gently and carefully being resolved. The simple black and white drawings add a further layer of understanding, reflecting the mood of the story and keeping the readers totally involved in a sensitive reading experience.

Jenny Blanch

Rosa's Singing Grandfather

Written by Leon Rosselson
Barn Owl £4.99 ISBN: 1 9030 1552 9



Wherever Grandfather goes he sings. His singing exploits began when he was a young waiter and went to see an opera company in town (though he had amazed his family much earlier by singing a song in the bathtub); and continued in such unlikely places as the zoo, the beach and at Rosa's school carol service. Grandfather is a funny man; forgetful, sleepy, a bit of an adventurer, a great storyteller who is always likely to burst into song, and a wonderful friend for Rosa whose father seems to have disappeared. Their meetings and exciting escapades together show just how delightful and rewarding such a relationship can be. A grand book for readers who lack confidence.

Jack Ousbey

Road Closed



Written by Jan Mark
Hodder £4.99
ISBN: 0 340 86100 2

This delightful tale must rank as one of the most benign ghost stories ever written. In it young Connie is invited by her grandparents to a street party well away from all her usual friends. Two other girls soon take her up, but who are they and why can no-one else see them? A visit to some old ladies down the street eventually solves this little mystery in a story that is heart-warming without ever straying into sentimentality - just the type of balance the late Jan Mark was always so good at achieving.

Nicholas Tucker

Araminta Spook: My Haunted House

Written by Angie Sage
Bloomsbury £5.99
ISBN: 0 7475 8346 1



Though Araminta Spook lives in Spook house with Aunt Tabitha, Uncle Drac and a suit of armour called Sir Percy, she has never seen a ghost there but is desperate for the experience. However, her plans look like being foiled when Aunt Tabby gives up her long struggle to deal with the boiler and says she is selling the house. Aghast, Araminta hatches a plan to stop the sale.

In so doing she finds a secret passage and in it, at last, a ghost, that of Sir Percy's page. She also learns that there's a lot more to Sir Percy than meets the eye. But her scheme, even with the ghosts' help, goes awry. The extraordinary Wizzard family who come to buy the house are immune to Araminta's shocks: in fact they think they are the best recommendation possible. So they move in, Araminta's family doesn't move out and Araminta finds a new friend in Wanda, with whom she can share further adventures. In fact, the next of these engaging stories is already written and the first chapter, as an end piece, is included here to prove it. With a whole series in prospect it may well capture the imagination of newly independent readers.

Dennis Hamley

grk and the pelotti gang



Written by Joshua Doder
Andersen Press £4.99
ISBN: 1 84270 527 X

Set in Brazil; specifically the Banco do Brasil where three guards are aimlessly wandering around until three bank robbers enter the building and shout "Nobody move!". They get away with thirty-two million pounds. But they didn't stop there... many more banks were targeted and if they were not caught the whole of Brazil would be ruined. The Chief of Police knew who they were - the Pelotti Brothers - but he couldn't find them. That's when Timothy Malt, his dog grk and Natasha and Max Raffifi stepped in. They all flew to Brazil to help apprehend the elusive bank robbers. The story races along at breakneck speed as exciting adventure follows exciting encounters - a kidnapping, a plane crash, a death-defying escapade involving the world's biggest waterfall - all leading to a thrilling climax. A light, entertaining read which is accessible and engaging for younger readers.

Pat Tate

The Baker Street Boys: The Case of the Captive Clairvoyant

Written by Anthony Read
Walker Books £4.99
ISBN: 0 7445 7016 6

Set in Victorian London's Baker Street, home of the famous detective Sherlock Holmes, one can almost taste the choking fogs, smell the pungent drains and trip over the uneven cobbles. The Boys, (which include girls amongst their number) are a group of orphans and street urchins who live here. Sparrow works as a call boy at the Imperial Music Hall, where he meets Marvin the Mystic and his young assistant, Mary. It is clear that Mary is in some kind of trouble, but with Holmes and Watson away on another case, it falls to the Baker Street Boys to rescue her. And somewhere behind it all the villainous Moriarty spins his web of evil. A very exciting story for those who enjoy reading about the



past. However, the characters are a little one-dimensional and reminded me of *The Secret Seven* with Cockney accents!

Anna Harris

The Questing Knights of the Faerie Queen

Written by Geraldine McCaughrean
Hodder £8.99 ISBN: 0 340 86622 5

Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, published at the end of the sixteenth century, and written as a long poem, has never been regarded as an easy read. Who better to make those medieval laws of chivalry accessible to children than Geraldine McCaughrean. In this skilful retelling she invites the reader to take up the quest of knighthood and ride out into the Land of Faeries to right wrongs, rescue prisoners and slay monsters; but not before they have listened to the tales of six knights who took part in last year's festival, in their bid to excel in the virtues of chivalry and win the favours of Gloriana, the Faerie Queen. It's a book full of magical journeys, and Jason Cockcroft's memorable pictures perfectly capture the ugliness of misshapen monsters like Orgoglio the giant, Shaggybag the man with elephant ears and Grille the pig with a human body. There's something in here to enthral all young readers.



Richard Monte



The Five Lost Aunts of Harriet Bean

Written by Alexander McCall Smith
Bloomsbury £4.99
ISBN: 0 7475 8047 2

Harriet Bean's dad is an inventor and absent minded enough to forget to tell her that she has five aunts. And, of course, he has lost all contact with them. What better excuse for a determined little girl like Harriet to go and look for them. Starting with a chance meeting with Aunt Veronica, now a strong lady in a circus, she tracks them all down - an opera singing ventriloquist, the bossiest teacher in the world and twin private detectives, each with a more ridiculous name than the last. Harriet's curiosity and determination win the day and they are all reunited. Plenty of humour and originality for newly confident readers and with such rich material in this re-issue.

Janice Knight

The White Giraffe

Written by Lauren St John
Orion £9.99
ISBN: 1 84255 520 0

Stunned by the loss of her parents in a terrible fire, Martine must face moving to South Africa to live with a strangely remote grandmother. Why is she so reluctant to have the girl live with her on the Sawubona game reserve? Can the rumour about



a rare white giraffe being nearby really be true? That animal leads Martine into a rich world of hidden cave paintings, old magic and unexpected dangers. As her own gifts emerge Martine discovers unimaginable power - a thoughtful, compelling shorter novel.

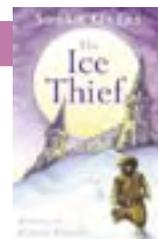
Marianne Adey

The Ice Thief

Written by Susan Gates
Illustrated by Chris Fisher
Orchard £3.99
ISBN: 1 84362 580 6

The title and cover, of a small boy dressed in sacking and running from a snow covered castle clutching an ice pick, invites you to become involved in this engaging tale. Little, but sturdy, Gideon makes a poor living by stealing ice from the Grand Duke's frozen ponds. He sells it to the palace cook for the sculpted swans and iced desserts so beloved at banquets. When he is almost apprehended he hides in the room of the Grand Duke's daughter. They discover that they are both equally ignored and mistreated by their widowed parents so decide to make a bid for freedom together. It's a rumbustious, good-humoured farce of a book, tempered, as ever, with Gates' genuine concern for the underdog. Great fun.

Tina Massey



You're a Bad Man, Mr Gum



Written by Andy Stanton
Egmont £4.99
ISBN: 1 4052 2310 3

The jokes swarm off the pages. The author was a stand-up comedian, they tell us, who is presumably now able to sit down and tell us this galloping story of Polly and the goodies who defeat the baddies to save Jake the dog. What more do you want? Restraint? Of course not.

Pat Thomson

The Great American Mousical

Written by Julie Andrews-Edwards
Illustrated by Emma Walton-Hamilton
Puffin £9.99
ISBN: 0 141 38277 5

This is Julie Andrews' first book to be published in the UK for thirty years and is an adventure story about theatre - something about which she knows a great deal. It contains the message that size is not always the best, and in this tale somebody very small makes a big difference. Set on Broadway, with all the mouse characters having names derived from well-known musicals, readers are encouraged to keep on turning the pages by the fine illustrations - created by Tony Walton, the set and costume designer. A book with something for everyone.

David Blanch

