

# NOW DON'T GET ME WRONG...

## Chris Powling NUMBER 20: Miss Bowe

...was a bit of a show-off, I admit. For a start, there was the way she flagged up her latest class story. She'd purse her lips, roll her eyes, glance melodramatically over her shoulder as if in fear of imminent arrest, then give us an enormous wink. What we were about to share, she seemed to be saying, was a secret so wonderful our lives might be changed forever. Magicians have produced rabbits from hats with more modesty.

Then came her how-to-handle a book routine. With fingertip control, and never less than total respect, she'd show us the cover (front and back), rifle delicately through the pages, slip us a sneak preview of the frontispiece – most books had one in those days – and audibly smack her lips. After this came the sniff.

The sniff?

You bet. She'd raise the open book slowly to her nose and inhale deeply. "Printer's ink," she'd declare. "My favourite..."

By then, of course, we were hooked. And stayed that way the entire time she read to us. I'd love to describe her reading technique in detail. After all, to match a build-up like hers, it must have been awesome. Did she put on 'voices', for instance? Or act out key scenes as if she were performing on stage? The truth is I never noticed. All I can recall is the books themselves

– *The Just-So Stories*, *The King of the Golden River*, *Treasure Island* and once, by popular and never-to-be-repeated request (Miss Bowe had her standards), *Five Go to Smugglers Top*. They're my favourite memory of Primary School. Not a bad achievement, I'd argue, for a teacher who was in charge of The Top Class with the 11+ looming.

Of course, that was fifty years ago. Nowadays, teachers have SATs and OFSTED and LEAGUE TABLES looming. So imagine my delight, on an author visit last term, I came across a young teacher who keeps her current read-aloud locked up tight in a very public deed-box. "It's to stop the children reading ahead of me," she declared.

"Won't they get it from the library?" I asked. "Or buy a copy for themselves?"

"Oh," she grinned. "I do hope so..."

Miss Bowe to the life, I'd say. Shouldn't we have someone like her in every primary classroom?

Chris Powling's *Readers Who Don't ... And How to Persuade Them Otherwise* is available from The Reading and Language Information Centre, University of Reading, Reading, Berks  
£3.99 ISBN: 0 7049 1405 0  
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