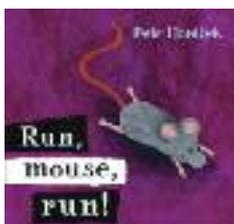




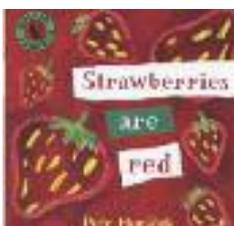
# Petr Horáček:

## A perfect start for getting children into books and storytelling

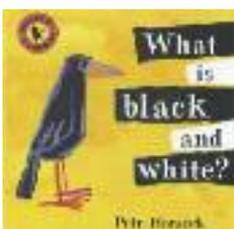
**P**etr has very warm memories of Prague where he learnt his skills of painting, drawing, print making and experimental arts, firstly in the high school and later at the Academy of Fine Art. It was while he was studying there that one day his tutor asked him to look after a young English student called Claire who was coming to study in the department. In his own words, "I've been looking after her ever since" and the couple moved to England in 1994. Within eight years he had published his first two colour primer books, *Strawberries are Red* 2001 and *What is Black and White?* also 2001. Their impact at the time was like a breath of fresh air with spontaneous mouth watering fluidity of colour and innovatory die cut page structures. Both these books displayed Petr's immense illustration abilities, a steely passion for telling stories in fresh and innovative ways using a celebration of colour and physical boldness within the robust structure of a board book format; allowing very young children to hold, fondle and learn for themselves from the shaped pages of the thick card. *Strawberries are Red* consisted of six lusciously colourful fruit which are shown on separate turning leaves to be ingeniously overlaid by the final die cut illustration of a bowl making the whole book become all the colours in "my fruit salad". A wonderful introduction to innovative book structures and storytelling by building up to a surprise climax whilst all the time holding the reader in suspenseful anticipation. This is a multi-sensory visual treat of a book, suggesting taste and smell to ignite the imagination and form an appetiser for a healthy "five a day" regime.



*What is Black and White?* This is an equally cleverly crafted and ingenious book for young hands to play with endlessly. Seven pages of different sizes alternate the contrast between blackness and whiteness and when overlaid successively conjoin with the imposing head at the end of the book to form a zebra that is, of course, black and white. A stunning and unforgettable learning process and the transformation is worth forming many times in order to learn through play and realise how ingeniously one has created something totally unexpected.

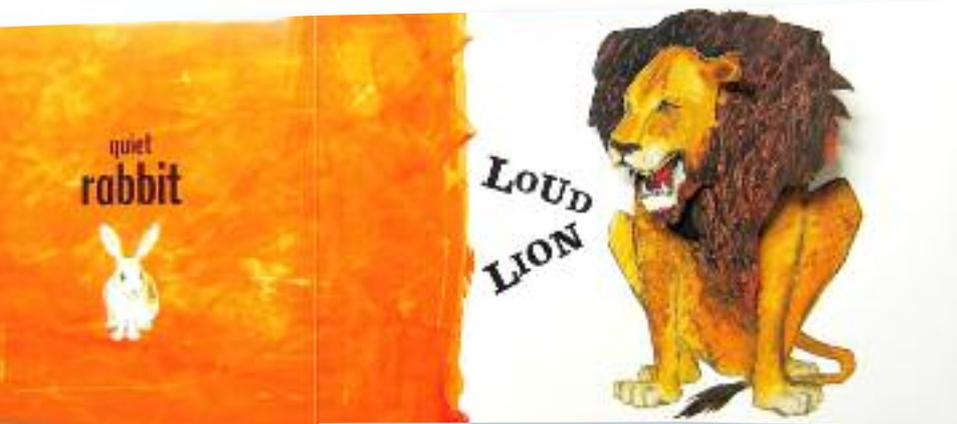


The ideas for these books had grown out of a meeting Petr had with his editor, who advised him to originate more titles to make a series. You can imagine how thrilling this was for him. His memories of the journey home by train afterwards are vivid as he recalls having conjured up at least seven before he reached his destination. All of his picture, pop up and board books, numbering over



twenty to date, exude with luscious colour and texture by the nature of his working with all forms of experimental colour; through print, using polystyrene blocks and collage. The board books, in particular, are of exceptional quality for sharing, learning and teaching about simple concepts and basic information as well as telling stories beyond the limit of the shaped page. To prove this point, just follow the thrilling adventure through Petr's favourite title *Run Mouse Run* 2005. In this ingenious board book he has created a fast moving chase for mouse through a domestic landscape, where the child is learning the meaning of the physical concepts of "over-

across-up-down-into-out and through". Each stage is portrayed from very different angles to heighten and correctly exploit the drama; the climax being out of this world but a real unexpected surprise. It has all the appeal of fast pacing, drama and clearly drawn detail through the use of colour and texture, sometimes leaving the image looking unfinished to invite children to try for themselves drawing, crayoning or enjoying



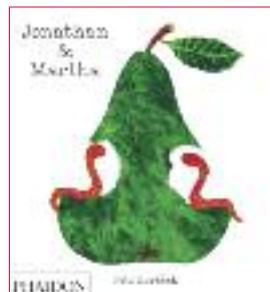
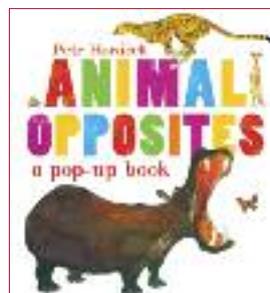
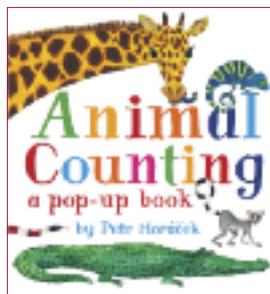
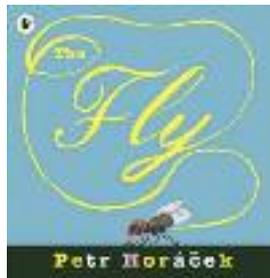
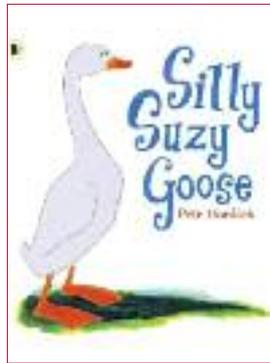
Spread from *Animal Opposites*



Spread from Animal Opposites

*Animal Counting* has a clarity of digit identity portrayed through both expressive and more formal characters which inform and connect as a lasting learning memory, such as the nine leaping lemurs (illustrated). Hopefully there will be a third to this series which we can eagerly anticipate.

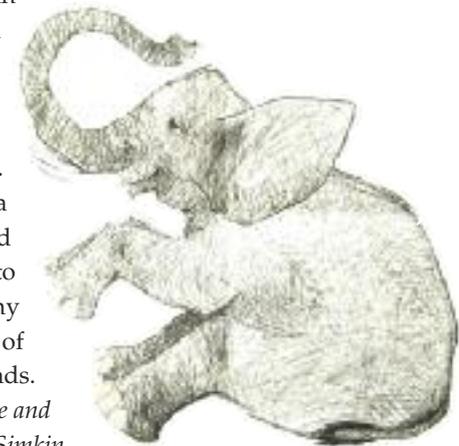
colour, telling stories and having fun. There are few words in the book but sufficient to move the story on and they are using his own expressive typeface. The story will rest forever in the memory as an adventure with humour, particularly at the time when the reader holds the handle of the mug, little realising that they are also handling a mouse. The nature of the shaped page will create shock, pleasure and a smile in equal measure, all part of this innovative book experience. This underlines Petr's unique contribution to raising the importance of this genre. In all his books there is an immaculate attention to detail, with an energy in storytelling and a sense of passion whether you are following the two characters synonymous with Petr's name, Suzy Goose and Mouse or enjoying any of his other titles. As movable features in books create expense Petr has published seven books with a single novelty feature to highlight the climax of the story, including *Butterfly*, *Butterfly*, 2007, *Fly*, 2010 and *Jonathan and Martha*, 2012. This latter is a picture story book, full of action telling an expressively emotional story of two worms meeting and sharing life together.



Petr has also published a riveting pop up for early learning, *Animal Counting* in 2012 to be followed by *Animal Opposites* pop up due to be published in September 2013. Both are exquisitely designed with impact in making the basic information instantly available and memorable. The appeal of *Opposites* stems from the three-dimensional formation of the animals, whether it is a big elephant facing up to a small ladybird or a loud lion out-voicing a quiet rabbit to make this book a rich experience and highly functional in teaching and learning basic concepts.

After seeing many of Petr's books in the sense of their variety and attractive appeal, it was a great pleasure meeting him at home in Worcester where we were surrounded by vibrantly coloured and expressively made paintings by himself, friends and his wife Claire, (who we also learnt is a musician,) and a friendly picture editor who helps make choices from all the image alternatives he produces for each spread. We were also privileged to see and hear Petr animating his story boards and demonstrating just how actively and energetic his involvement is with storytelling through the thoughtfully prepared and accurately constructed novelty devices in his books, whether it is a hole in the page or a shaped finish to a leaf.

As an illustrator and designer of books for the very young, nobody has brought more empirically didactic or expressive innovation to both help the child discover and connect with the world in a broad context as well as nurturing essential awareness to dramatic storytelling through words and pictures. Each of Petr's books is a treasure today and hopefully will continue to excite and nurture many future generations of children with active minds.



Mike and Theresa Simkin

- Strawberries are Red* Walker Books 2001 £4.99 ISBN: 978-1401325102
- Run Mouse Run* Walker Books 2005 £4.99 ISBN: 978-1844288625
- Choo Choo* Walker Books 2009 £4.99 ISBN: 978-1406325066
- Night Night* Walker Books 2011 £4.99 ISBN: 978-1406329667
- Animal Counting Pop Up Book* Walker Books 2012 £9.99 ISBN: 978-1406337617
- Animal Opposites Pop Up Book* Walker Books 2013 £10.99 ISBN: 978-1406342338
- Jonathan and Martha* Phaidon 2012 £7.95 ISBN: 978-0714863511
- Butterfly Butterfly* Walker Books 2007 £6.99 ISBN: 978-1406340062
- The Fly* Walker Books 2010 £5.99 ISBN: 978-1406330731
- Silly Suzy Goose* Walker Books 2006 £5.99 ISBN: 978-1406304589