

The number of children's books published each year is staggering; and how to choose what book is just right for your child always difficult. At *Carousel* we believe in using our review space to highlight books that we think are worth considering. We don't take up space lambasting those sloppy, trite books, which sometimes seem to be published by the yard. This approach can make our review pages look somewhat over-enthusiastic. Looking back over a dozen or more years we seem to have covered most of the books that have won prizes, most that have caused a fuss and most that have stood the test of time by staying in print. But of course we're fallible and some slip through the net.

We use a wide range of reviewers, all of whom have experience in the children's book world, whether as teachers, librarians, authors, former publishers, booksellers, etc. We all have different tastes and don't, thank goodness, always agree. We don't put ages on our fiction reviews but rather label sections and run the reviews on those pages starting (roughly) with the youngest. We believe that ages on the back of books do not help readers, and a battalion of writers, librarians and booksellers agree.

The bookshop scene has changed remarkably with the rise and rise of the chains. In 1997 the Restrictive Practices Court ruled that the Net Book Agreement (where all books were sold at a fixed price) was against the public interest and was therefore ruled illegal. The collapse of the Agreement strengthened large bookshop chains and reduced book prices. It also paved the way for the large supermarket chains to take a chunk of the book business, typically offering a small number of best-selling titles at deeply discounted prices. Independent booksellers could not compete on price and many have sold up. True, some lousy, dusty, fusty shops have gone but so also have some good and knowledgeable stock-holding shops unable to compete in the price-cutting wars. If you are fortunate enough to have a good children's bookshop near you we do urge you to support it.

Table displays have always been the best way to display and sell books – and the canny chains are aware of this and use it as a source of income, charging publishers for table and window space. This can lead to a certain dull repetition, the same books promoted across the country, and an increased difficulty for new authors and illustrators to gain a footing. Unless, of course, where the publisher can see big, fairly instant sales. The slow-burning word-of-mouth book is having a tough time.

Newspapers too are finding sales hard to come by and some are reacting by making their literary editors redundant. Book reviews may well be even harder to find in the national press and, perversely, when books are talked/written about at the time when prize short-lists are announced, they are rarely displayed in any bookshop. Always seems a missed opportunity.

We plan to expand our reviews by including some on our website, over and above those published in the magazine. You can now find on the news blog details of children's book prizes and other items but over the next few months we will slowly revamp the website. So do visit it, comment on the news items and let us know what you think about the magazine, the current issues being aired, whether it's Alan Gibbons' solid campaign for libraries, or the age-banding debate or anything else. Let's get a discussion going on the blog. We look forward to hearing from you.

www.carouselguide.co.uk

Enid Stephenson

We are grateful to Macmillan Children's Books for their help with the front cover of this issue. *The Gruffalo Tenth Anniversary Edition* ISBN: 978-0330507417 £5.99

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Issue 41 Spring 2009

Published 3 times a year in March, June and November ISSN 1368-6364
 Editors: Jenny Blanch, David Blanch, Enid Stephenson, Valerie Bierman
 Non-Fiction: Pat Thomson Designer: Heather Blackham
 Printer: Clifford Press Ltd, Coventry

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 Readers can now safely subscribe online using Paypal
 Annual subscription for issues March, June & November cost
 UK - £11.25, Europe (incl. Ireland) £16.00, Rest of the World £19.00