

Bridging the Gap

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The three billygoats gruff on the bridge with the troll beneath. See article by Tomoko Masaki.

EDITORIAL

'Mind the gap!' – such a familiar admonition it has almost become a joke. Yet it is very necessary. As one steps off the train there is a gap that has to be bridged and without a timely reminder an accident could happen. There are a great many 'gaps' to be negotiated in life, some real, others, perhaps, metaphorical. We talk about 'a gap in understanding' or perhaps a 'gulf' between people, cultures or the realisation of a dream. What is needed is a bridge.

It was Pat Pinsent's moving account of establishing a way of reaching Henry that made me think about the concept of the bridge, and the way in which reading and books can provide one. This might be in quite an obvious way by providing insights into a different way of life, a different language as translation can do. Or it might be the recognition of others or even oneself. Rebecca Butler addresses this in her article, reminding us that a bridge allows two-way traffic. Books and reading allow the reader to meet others, as well as to identify a personal situation. It is great to have some titles that provide such opportunities, often quite subtly, and that operate on different levels.

It is also good to be reminded of organisations that can provide a guide to such material, organisations such as the Letterbox Library. Fen Coles' recommendations show that texts do not have to be obvious and the effect may be subconscious; the illustration of a truly mixed community may be all that is required to 'bridge a gap' that might not even have been noticed. This is, perhaps, what is revealed through the words of Pam Dix's young students recording their early reading experiences. Here it is the recognition that it is reading as an activity that may be the bridge as well as the material.

Here we encounter the possibility of another gap; the physical encounter with reading itself. This may be the format of the book itself – the size, the font, the content – as well as the ability of the reader. Providing a 'bridge' to address such concerns is a delicate balancing act. The aim is to provide a path that will bring success. As Mairi Kidd comments 'We are all reluctant readers, sometimes', something publishers should remember when thinking about design.

While there are very obvious ways books can provide a bridge – to a different culture, different character, different time – they are much more powerful than that. I was fascinated to be introduced to the notion of 'liminality' – the boundaries, the gaps that children have to negotiate as they grow up – by Tomoko Masaki at the 2012 IBBY International Congress. Her paper did not explore this in an abstruse scientific way, but used a picture book to illustrate how both story and picture book could operate on a number of levels. A child audience could enjoy a familiar story while being presented (subconsciously) with the idea of meeting difficulties, of growing – and crossing a bridge to greater maturity. I am delighted that we can include her article here.

In the forthcoming one-day conference to be held at Roehampton University, London, on 8 November, the theme will be that of 'Belonging' – specific areas where the notion of a book as a bridge could come into play. However, as the articles presented here show there are many areas in life where a book – or books – has, indeed does, provide the way across a gap, whether a real-life situation, access to a welcome world of the imagination or a sure path to understanding.

Mind the gap – pick up a book.

Ferelith Hordon

Children's Books and Dementia

Pat Pinsent

My husband Henry was diagnosed with Alzheimer's more than three years ago. In addition to his medication (both prescribed and a medical trial), I have been ensuring that he has a cognitively stimulating environment. This has included taking him to art groups, both at the Dulwich Picture Gallery before we moved from London and now in north Norfolk, as well as participating in Singing for the Brain groups and other musical opportunities, since research suggests this has a positive effect on the memory. Since June 2012 I have also been reading to him every day, partly in an attempt to stimulate his memory for narrative, and also because he seems to enjoy the activity. I have found that children's books generally have gone down better than most of those written for adults. I abandoned Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* (1937) after one chapter as he couldn't cope with all the possible suspects! I also gave up on Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995) as he seemed to find Lyra's parallel world difficult to accept. I persevered with Graham Greene's *Monsignor Quixote* (1983) but suspect that he didn't get as much from it as he did from some of the children's books. The only books presupposing an adult audience that seem to have succeeded with him have been a book about the hopping trips of East End families (an activity he shared), Melanie McGrath's *Hopping*, David Michie's fictional story *The Dalai Lama's Cat* (2012) and Doreen Tovey's humorous account of her Siamese cats, *Cats in the Belfry* (1957). All these share some of the qualities of books for younger children, with their clear characterisation and largely episodic plots.

Books set in the Second World War have been particularly popular with Henry since he was a child at the time. Robert Westall's *Blitzcat* (1989) (especially because it has an episodic structure, which meant he didn't have to remember the plot so thoroughly) and *The Machine Gunners* (1975) both gave him the opportunity to revisit older memories (which are much more secure than newer ones). Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War* (1973) was also a success, though I suspect he didn't fully come to terms with the 'present-day' framework. However Victor Watson's *Paradise Barn* (2009), despite its dealing with evacuees in an area near where Henry himself was for part of the war, proved rather too challenging with its mystery themes that demanded recalling events from previous days' readings.

I met his request for books with more remote historical themes with Elizabeth Laird's *Secrets of the Fearless* (2005) about a ship of the line, but although he clearly enjoyed the incidents, the overall plot structure proved rather too involved. By contrast, Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Bracelet of Bones* (2011) was easier to follow because the Vikings' river journey to Constantinople gives it a clear structure. Interestingly, their name for the city, Miklagaard, seems to have stayed with him. More recent history, in the form of Jacqueline Wilson's *Queenie* (2013), set in 1953, provided Henry with a good deal of enjoyment, perhaps because it relates to a period when he was about 20, an age that researchers suggest is particularly likely to furnish lasting memories – that and the black cat (you may begin to discern a sub-theme here!). Wilson's *Bed and Breakfast Star* (1994), by contrast, seemed to make little impact on him.

In the hope of avoiding horticultural confusion, I left three months between Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) (in which I think Colin made more impact on his memory than did Mary) and Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958). This on the whole worked, though during the reading of the later novel he did sometimes come up with the name of Dickon when, as is my practice before carrying on with the reading, I tried to get him to recall something of the 'story so far'. I suspect too that he was never quite clear about the time slip, though he certainly enjoyed the book as, currently, he is enjoying Pearce's *A Dog so Small* (1962).

Throughout this period, my choice has been governed by whether or not I myself want to read, or more often to reread, the books. I can't give any well-founded evidence that it has been of value as far as Henry's memory is concerned, as I have no control experiment. But I do feel that sharing books is of value to dementia patients, and that literature for children (as distinct from young adults) has a particular role to play in this respect. It is more likely to have well-defined characters and a clear, perhaps episodic, structure than much adult fiction, which may well be too sophisticated, as well as making too many demands on the reader's memory of the details of a complex plot. I hope that others who may find themselves in a similar position will be encouraged to take up this activity. The children's literature world is full of suitable books!

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- [Pat Pinsent is a Senior Research Fellow at Roehampton University, specialising in children's literature, the subject matter of most of her 15 books. Her main research interests lie in the diverse ways in which children's literature is currently developing, and the relationship between it and spirituality/religion. She also edits a Christian feminist journal.]

Understanding Disability: Bridges for Young Readers

Rebecca R. Butler

My research evidence, outlined below, suggests that children at Key Stage 2 (7–11 years) are relatively free from prejudice towards disabled people – free from the feeling that disabled people are somehow strange, threatening, alien, 'the other'. The same cannot be said of adults in contemporary society: in 2009 the National Centre for Social Research (NCSR) published a survey showing that 79% of its respondents believed there was some prejudice – a lot or a little – towards disabled people. How do unprejudiced children become prejudiced adults? And what can we do about it?

During the past half century disability scholars have generated a body of theory about disability. The World Health Organisation (WHO) produced a framework (the

International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)) that classified disabilities in individuals and within societies. This approach became widely known as 'the medical model'. Although the WHO intended their approach to be helpful, it was often attacked. The accusation was that people with the same impairment were all lumped together in a category, their individuality ignored. A different approach was developed, largely by organisations formed by disabled people themselves – the social model. Advocates of the social model argue that people who are blind, wheelchair users or cognitively limited have an impairment. Their disability stems from the fact that society fails to make arrangements that suit them. The social model became a mass movement. Later still, some scholars argued that the conflict between the advocates of the medical and social models was artificial and unnecessary. The capability approach sought to combine social and individual influences in a single approach.

My research demonstrates that children's literature can help children sustain attitudes towards disability free from prejudice. The books are available and mostly easy to find. Six recommended books are listed at the end of this article.

Other researchers have studied this issue before me. The responsibility for helping children develop and sustain positive attitudes towards disability rests with adults. Rieser and Mason explain the need as follows.

Children are not born with prejudices against disabled people, but acquire them. ... When children become adults they reinforce and legitimise the misinformation and fear in the form of policies and practices over which they have varying amounts of control. (1990: 7)

In a report sponsored by the Education and Social Research Council Beckett et al. (2009) have described focus groups conducted with disabled and non-disabled pupils in primary schools, a project designed to assess the views of schoolchildren towards disabled people. The children were invited to draw mind maps illustrating their views. Examination of Year 6 children's mind maps showed that these children associate the experience of disability with being 'hard', 'horrible' and 'lonely'. Beckett et al. took these views as expressing sympathy for disabled people.

The adults who may accept responsibility for helping children develop and sustain positive attitudes towards disability include educators (teachers, headteachers, librarians and learning support assistants for example), parents and older siblings. It is natural and perhaps inevitable for these adults to ask what methods they should consider when they seek to discharge this important responsibility. They have guidance from the celebrated Dutch educational philosopher Max van Manen.

And so as readers we find the experience of everyday life irresistibly shifted to the world of the novel where such fundamental life experiences are lived through vicariously. As we identify ourselves with the protagonist of a story, we live his or her feelings and actions without having to act ourselves. Thus we may be able to experience life situations, events, and emotions that we would normally not have. Through a good novel, then, we are given the chance of living through an experience that provides us with the opportunity of gaining insight into certain aspects of the human condition. (1990: 70)

My project involved group sessions with 37 pupils in five schools. One of the schools was for pupils with special needs. I opted not to be present myself at any of the group sessions, since the presence of someone in a wheelchair might have invalidated the research findings.

The children were presented with excerpts from two books in which motor impaired characters play an important part. (I chose motor impaired characters, wheelchair users, simply because there are many other impairments: treating them all alike would

be misleading.) The two books were Hilary McKay's *Saffy's Angel* (2001) and Jacqueline Wilson's *Sleepovers* (2001), both probably familiar to *IBBYLink* readers.

In McKay's book a girl in a wheelchair, Sarah Warbeck, seizes the attention of a non-disabled girl, Saffy Casson, by deliberately crashing her wheelchair into her. Then she helps Saffy uncover the secrets of her pre-adoption childhood. Sarah, despite her disability, emerges as the one with the drive and initiative.

In Wilson's book a young girl named Daisy tries to become a member of an exclusive circle at her new school, uncertain how to handle the potential embarrassment of having a sister, Lily, who uses a wheelchair and is aphasic. In the excerpt Daisy goes shopping with her mother to buy a present for one of her new friends. Lily comes along too, and has a fit of crying and screaming in the shop.

The readings from these two books were recorded on DVD and played to the pupils. A university colleague of mine volunteered to make the recording. Under the supervision of an adult, the pupils then discussed what they had heard. They also undertook in groups a brief written exercise, identifying words they thought appropriate to the characters.

The first point to note about the responses of the children in the group sessions is how free they were from prejudice towards disabled people and how rarely they used discriminatory terms. The pupils all joined in the discussion; none was too timid to take part. Sometimes they were supportive of the disabled characters. Sarah crashed her wheelchair into Saffy, for instance, because she was lonely, forced by circumstances to adopt a violent approach. Lily is upset by being the only disabled person in the shop, frightened by the crowd, being stared at. At other times their sympathy ran short. Disability is not an adequate excuse for violent behaviour. One or two of the pupils accused Sarah of deliberately stalking Saffy and branded her 'crazy' and 'creepy'. Some pupils saw Daisy as trying to buy a present that would impress her new friends and so make her an acceptable candidate for the club she wants to join. She shouldn't have this important mission wrecked. Her mother is to blame for bringing Lily along with them. Others, however, saw Daisy as exploiting her sister's distress. Lily's behaviour exerts pressure on their mother, who will spend more money just to get out of the shop and end the anguish – a good result for Daisy.

In relation to Daisy and Lily, most pupils tried to understand how the different needs for attention of a disabled and a non-disabled sibling could be justly met – an issue of critical importance in many families. But one or two pupils were more interested in revenge.

Teacher: If you were writing the story what do you think you might make happen next. What would you do?

Boy: Um... When I get home I would get really annoyed at my sister and maybe hide all her best toys and maybe some even throw away.

Girl: If you had a pet, say a dog or a cat, and say it's my brother's train set, because he really likes it, so I could just easily take a train and go 'Here you go kitten' and the cat would just destroy it.

The pupils from the special educational needs (SEN) school expressed views that were distinctive and informative. They were naturally more aware than other pupils of the context in which disabled people live their lives. They were better informed about disability. McKay describes Sarah Warbeck carrying out a tricky manoeuvre in her wheelchair. Pupils at other schools expressed admiration. The disabled pupils immediately saw the move as physically impossible. The pupils from the SEN school had a clear view of the role that literature can play in making them less alien, strange and remote in the eyes of non-disabled children, building a bridge between the two communities of young people. A motor impaired girl explains why.

Basically I think it's important for fiction to represent disability particularly with children's books because opinions are formed by children from an early age by what they read and if they had for example a hero in the book who had a disability then they wouldn't stare at us and be mean about us, they'd accept us and they'd want to be our friends and I think that that would lead to a more accepting next generation.

Occasionally a pupil in a group session would express a view of great profundity. A Year 6 girl at one of the schools wondered whether a wheelchair user who managed to leave her wheelchair might experience a crisis of identity.

But if all your time was spent in a wheelchair then you wouldn't like coming out because then who are you when you get out?

In a deeply moving moment a Year 5 girl at another school makes the following statement:

I sometimes get a bit embarrassed with my sister because she has special needs and she sometimes... she... like if you have... if your sister or brother has special needs and they're crying and they can't speak, you get a bit embarrassed. And you think... is someone saying... is that your sister? And you might get... like a bit... pale because you didn't... you have to tell them the truth but you didn't want them to know that that's your sister.

What influences can we identify helping to shape the views of these young people? Clearly their families play an important part. The schools in my sample were all located in relatively affluent, middle-class areas. They show signs of having been brought up in educated, tolerant and enlightened families. It is an open question whether similar results would have arisen in more deprived areas.

The school plays a significant role. There was no evidence of systemic prejudice on the basis of race, gender or disability in any of the schools. These schools are doing a fine job of bringing up young people in the twenty-first century.

Books are an under-utilised resource. There are plenty of books that provide stimulation and guidance on the issue of disability. Some of them are probably already in the school library. Most of these books are contemporary works by living authors. But canonical books by writers of the Victorian and Edwardian eras are also still widely read. Books such as Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (1872), Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* (1913) and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) still have much to teach children. Sometimes the canonical books embody values we today regard as negative: *What Katy Did* refers to 'God's school of pain'. But exposure to such outdated concepts is actually valuable, highlighting the attitudes that need to be avoided in relation to disability.

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Six books that Make Useful Bridges with Disability

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[Rebecca R. Butler holds a BA in English Literature and an MA in Children's Literature. She has recently submitted her thesis for a Doctorate in Education. This article employs some of her thesis research. Rebecca works as a literacy tutor at two primary schools. She reviews children's books for three journals and is a regular speaker at IBBY conferences.]

Not so Special: Reading Reluctance and the Mainstream

Mairi Kidd

Davi picks up a ruler and holds it to the spine of Chris Bradford's novel *Gamer* (2012) to check it passes muster. 'I'm one of those people who likes their book less than 1 cm long,' he explains. At 112 pages and with a spine width of 1.3 cm, *Gamer* doesn't quite pass the test but it does have a jazzy 3D cover and so Davi reads it anyway. (Result!)

Davi is 13. He has Asperger's Syndrome, and perhaps this is behind his unusual assessment of book length in centimetres. Or perhaps not – he is extremely bright with a wicked sense of humour, and he knows the ruler trick will earn him a laugh. And his preference for a short read is no indicator of a reading problem – Davi is an above-averagely able reader. But he is also a teenage boy, and it's common for this group to prefer books that clock in at under 100 pages. There are many factors that may account for this preference – subconscious concerns that a long book will turn out to be too difficult, perhaps, or an unwillingness to engage for so long with one form of entertainment. But whatever these factors are, one thing they are *not* is a 'special-needs' issue. Reading reluctance is now firmly part of the mainstream.

Back in 1998, Patience Thomson and Lucy Jukes sought to address the inequality that left children with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia and related issues) out in the cold while their peers read Harry Potter books (1997–2007), *Northern Lights* (1995) and the rest of the new wave of brilliant children's fiction appearing in the 1990s. To this end Thomson and Jukes founded Barrington Stoke. Today, we understand that one child in seven may struggle to read due to dyslexia, but that's just the tip of the iceberg – as many as one in two do not enjoy reading for other reasons, and these children form the core of Barrington Stoke's market.

Does this mean that the reading landscape has changed hugely in the 16 years since 1998? I don't believe so – I think we simply understand it better today. But I'm not convinced that the children's publishing industry has wholeheartedly taken up the challenge this landscape presents.

The National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey for 2012 (2013) found that only 50% of young people enjoy reading 'very much' or 'quite a lot'. This figure has remained unaltered in the Trust's surveys since 2005. A quarter of young people

reported that they 'rarely' or 'never' read outside of school. This group has grown in recent years. So why are these children not reading?

There may be as many answers to this question as there are children concerned, but the following issues are common:

- Children entering school with a language deficit may struggle to cotton-on to reading as quickly as their peers and their learning will be slower as a result, promoting a perception of reading as a chore.
- Homes with no reading culture result in a lack of positive role models for reading – role models for boys are particularly lacking.
- The teaching of reading and particularly dependency on reading-scheme materials may result in a failure on the part of many children to understand the point of reading – or to find any joy in it.
- Children may struggle to find material of interest to them at a level they can access easily.
- Many children develop a preference for the instant gratification of console games and other media, and struggle with the quiet and focus required for reading.
- There are still many children with unidentified reading, language, hearing and vision issues who receive little appropriate support, and pressures on education budgets mean that this could continue to be the case.

Children who do not read are analogous, to a degree, to new drivers who do not drive. Without significant practice they do not build up the 'mileage' required for the process to become automatic. It is entirely possible that a child may learn to read, but never actually spend time reading and therefore loses the skill again.

The good news is that design and publishing informed by accessibility criteria for dyslexic readers can also benefit the huge number of young people who are reluctant to read or struggle to engage with books for no specific reason. As Davi can attest, length is one key consideration. There are many more. Clear fonts with distinctive shapes for all characters help hugely, as does a reasonable point size and generous character and line spacing. Text that is not justified to the right helps in two ways – the character spacing remains even, and the reader can keep his/her place more easily in a paragraph. Thicker paper helps to eliminate the ghost of the words on the other side of the page, which can confuse the eye, and a gentle tint to the paper can reduce the painful 'glare' created by the huge contrast between black and white.

Newspapers automatically look to accessibility measures such as these when designing or redesigning their layouts. Do children's publishers? I put on my accessibility police hat and undertook an entirely unscientific survey to find out. I looked at the 12 children's books within easiest reach on my shelf at home – three picture books aimed at 3–5s, two 5–8 fiction titles, five 8–12s and two young adult novels.

For a less confident reader, the following issues jump out:

- Both young adult novels clock in at 500+ pages and one manages this while still using a very small point size. The word count on each is at least 80,000.
- Both young adult novels, four of the 8–12s and two of the 5–8s use right-hand justification, resulting in uneven character and word spacing. In one of the young adult novels the spacing leads me to misread the words 'we don't need you as an ally' as 'we don't need you as anally'. Oops!
- Both 5–8s are highly designed, flowing text around objects and occasionally laying text over busy backgrounds. One uses 'reversed out', i.e. white text on a black background.

- Only one of the picture books uses standard left-right, top-bottom layout for text and the other two use a variety of type and point sizes for emphasis and other effects.

Now, any one of the publishers behind these books might protest that they make no claims regarding accessibility, or protest the idea that we should legislate against lengthy, densely typeset tomes or highly designed layouts for those who want them. To a degree, these are fair points. But there's a 'but'. One of the 5–8s calls itself 'an early reader'. This implies that it accepts that its reader is inexperienced, and therefore might one not expect some care and attention to layout to support that reader in making the jump to reading independently? As for the 500+ page tomes, one of these has been touted as a 'must read' for the last 12 months. I struggled through it recently in the hope it might reward persistence. It didn't; it was messy, dull and, to my eye, in need of nothing more than a good prune.

There are, on the other hand, lots of books out there 'for reluctant readers' and authors/publishers who describe themselves as specialising in writing/publishing for this group. These claims very often relate to content – 'reluctant readers' are perceived as liking stories about cars, for example, or extreme sports, gadgets, and so on. We don't subscribe to that view – the term 'reluctant readers' can encompass half the population at one time or another, and it's nonsensical to think that they can be viewed as a homogeneous group. Who would write books with content designed to appeal 'to left-handed people'?

What these authors are actually doing is writing books that will appeal to people who are interested in the subject matter, and who may or may not be reluctant readers. They are also, potentially, further isolating a huge number of reluctant readers by defining them in quite reductive ways – specifically, note, assuming they're all male.

We don't believe in this approach – we believe in making a huge range of brilliant stories available in a form a less confident or less enthused reader can access without too much hard work as they build their confidence and experience. We're reluctant readers too, at times – reluctant to waste the kind of time it takes to slog through 500+ pages of a book that doesn't reward the effort, to go cross-eyed over cramped, tiny print, or to try to work out whether text split in two columns around a picture should be read as two columns or one paragraph. And so, as *an ally* of struggling and reluctant readers everywhere (and, OK, *an ally* retentive re accessibility too), we should like to submit the following.

- To the design departments of children's publishing houses everywhere: as well as asking yourself if it looks good, please ask yourself if it's readable. If it's not, please do something about it.
- To the producers of *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street*, etc.: please show the occasional character onscreen reading a book, magazine, newspaper, etc. – quietly in the Rovers/Vic/wherever or out loud to a child at home. Especially the men.
- To the world at large: please don't equate 'big books' with 'good books' or 'picture books', and 'illustrated books' with 'baby books'. Please try to avoid saying 'that's too young/old/easy/hard for you'. Let readers find their own level – reading for pleasure has to enshrine the principle of personal choice.

The best thing any of us can do for children who don't read is to be advocates for reading. Rave about what you've read, carry books around to hand out and recommend, and please, please give shorter fiction a try. Think about Davi and the value of a bitesize book – and let's go on building bridges.

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[Mairi Kidd is Managing Director at Barrington Stoke, which publishes books for reluctant readers and children with reading difficulties. It is refocusing its list, aiming to grow its presence in the trade with changes in its jacket design and production values.]

Picture Books Exploring Connections, Bridges and Identities.

Fen Coles

A Bus Called Heaven

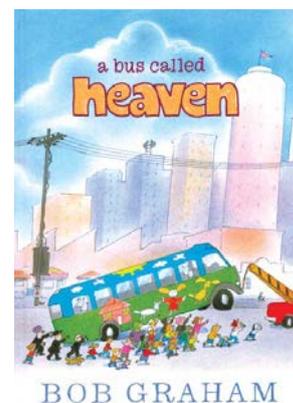
Bob Graham

Bob Graham is an absolute favourite amongst Letterbox Library's reviewers. Quite apart from his thoughtful, subtly drawn stories, his artwork consistently delivers what we would call 'inclusion in action'. With Graham, diversity is somehow effortless. He has an almost microscopic eye for our differences – our different hues and dress, and iconography and mannerisms. And then, always, his narratives bring us together in all our glorious disparateness through an object, a place, a sound or a single butterfly-effect action.

There are so many examples of Graham's work I could cite, but in this instance I've chosen the Amnesty-endorsed *A Bus Called Heaven* (2011). This delightful picture book follows a local community as they come together and then regenerate their neighbourhood. It is trademark Graham. There is a lead character, Stella, but in truth everyone is a star in this story of mutual cooperation: all ages are here – from babies toddling around to elderly people; the cast is multicultural – Greek, Asian, White and African Caribbean; it is multi-faith and includes an endearing white-haired trio of priests (a vicar, rabbi and, I think, a granthi); there are Hells Angels leather men, working-class women with hooded tops and huge earrings, skin heads and frazzled-looking parents. It is a solidly and refreshingly recognisable picture of so many diverse, urban communities in the West. We are all there, with our tattoos, our piercings, our glasses, our headscarves and niqabs, and skull caps and taqiyahs, our different families, our cornrow styles and fuzzy red locks, and our bald tops. We are there with our downtrodden areas, our high-rises, our abandoned cars and our high streets complete with fast-food outlets.

We are all there with all the markers that make us unique. But, as always, Bob Graham delivers 'types' without the stereotypes, diversity without the easy tick boxes. In this particular story an elderly woman helps push a bus; a girl's prized possession is her football table; a builder's yard boss sports a pigtail; a mini-skirted white woman works on a clear-up operation alongside a Muslim man; turbaned Asian men play traditional Indian instruments atop a town bus; and hoodie graffiti artists are brought cups of tea by the local residents.

Graham's artwork is itself a tapestry of connections between people. But here the story is also concerned with shared lives: a broken-down bus in a poor neighbourhood brings curious people out of their homes to peer in and talk. Spearheaded by the vision of one small child who declares, 'It could be ... ours', all the neighbourhood then joins in to turn the bus into a creative, comfortable hub for their community (plus some urban snails and sparrows), which then also spills out into an array of street stalls. When the council threatens to remove the abandoned vehicle to a scrap yard, the

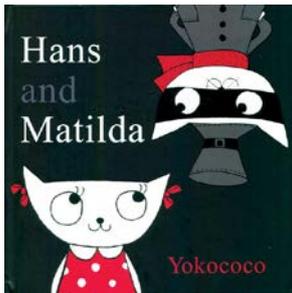


people protest and Stella wins the bus back for them all. Cooperation and harmony are the beating heart of this bus called Heaven.

Hans and Matilda

Yokococo

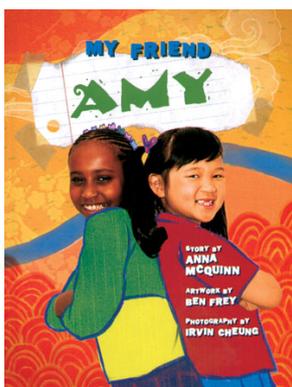
The inclusion of this book may not seem like an obvious choice. Described widely in reviews as a 'feline Jekyll and Hyde' for children, it certainly has appeal as a straight-up, boisterous, 'mainstream' storybook for the very young. But for us at Letterbox Library, we think *Hans and Matilda* (2012) also offers something else: a brilliantly snappy and anarchic tale of gender subversion. For this reason, it was shortlisted for the 2013 Little Rebels award.¹



Matilda is a 'good', 'sweet', 'thoughtful' girl cat, while Hans is a noisy, naughty, boy cat, prone to small acts of night-time vandalism. After Hans surpasses himself by setting free all the animals in the local zoo, a police investigation ensues. Ultimately this reveals that 'Hans' is in fact Matilda in disguise, complete with mask and detachable whiskers. The story ends with Matilda promising a police officer that she will be 'very, very good'... 'unless', the text continues, 'she was wearing a hat, and a mask, and some whiskers!'

Some of the most popular children's book characters have been anarchic little rebels and we would happily place Hans/Matilda in this canon. Yokococo delivers a gender-identity twist through a cute, kitten cover-up. The format is perfect for the age range – the very young, ages 3–6, are offered plain stark images with a minimal colour palette, sparse text and a relatively simple idea: a rigid gender binary that turns in on itself.

What could be a more direct, upfront, lucid way of exploring gender identities with children: what it means to be a boy or a girl, the different expectations of girls and boys, whether these are fair, the boundaries policed by gender stereotypes! Why does this 'girl', Matilda, feel she has to dress as a boy to be noisy, to go out at night, to be in public spaces, to be physically active – to take up space at all? Why does she have to present as a 'girl' when she is being 'well behaved'? These are big, yet accessible, thoughts for little children. This is a mini-rebellion perfectly complimented by stompingly bold, graphic artwork. If this is frightening thinking for some adults, we suspect many children will simply revel in the cheek of it. This is Minnie the Minx in glorious fast motion.



My Friend Amy

Anna McQuinn, Ben Frey and Irvin Cheung

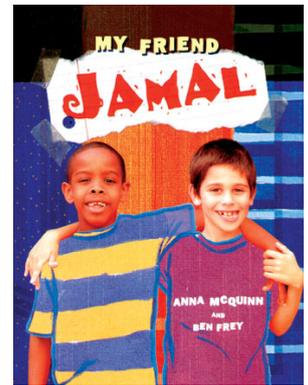
My Friend Jamal

Anna McQuinn and Ben Frey

Firm members of the Letterbox Library collection, these two books by independent book publisher Alanna Books convey a simple message about similarity across difference, but with a charming freshness, accessibility and authenticity.

Both books show a British child's friendship with a child whose family are recent migrants to the UK and within a multicultural landscape that is far more realistic than we usually see in picture books. Celebrations of 'multiculturalism' in children's books can inadvertently (and ironically) undo this positivity by resorting to lazy generalisations that recreate stereotypes. For example, there is a vast array of well-intentioned, around-the-world children's books that are sadly let down by Western countries such as the USA and Britain being universally represented by white children; similarly non-white children in 'multicultural books' set in Western countries are almost always introduced as refugees or as visitors – never as part of a settled population or as native to that country.

By contrast, *My Friend Amy* (2009) and *My Friend Jamal* (2009) confidently portray a much more recognisable world to our children, one that reflects their classrooms and neighbourhoods. In particular, in *My Friend Amy*, the ‘settled’ British child is represented by Monifa, a girl whose heritage is West African. Monifa’s Yoruba identity is acknowledged and respected, but it is not *her* ethnicity that is explored – instead, we hear about the transition of Amy’s family from Hong Kong to the UK and it is her family’s bridging of Chinese and British cultures that is at the forefront of the narrative. *My Friend Jamal* does refer to the experience of Somali refugees, but this is the first book Letterbox Library came across in which the Somali protagonist was actually born in the UK, rather than being an immediate survivor of the civil conflict.



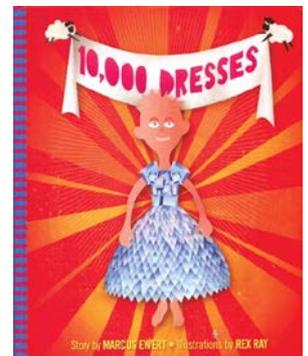
In both books, the children’s differences are never confined to their ethnicity or culture. Jamal doesn’t eat the same things as Joseph, not only because he is Muslim but also because he has allergies. Both Monifa and Joseph have a great deal in common with their friends, particularly in their play, and they also notice the differences in their friends’ homes – the clothes, food and smells especially. And, yet again, ethnic stereotypes are shunned at every turn. Jamal’s mum speaks Arabic and wears a headscarf but she also speaks Italian. Meantime, Jamal’s aunt wears a headscarf only for prayers.

For us the success of these books is that they do not reduce and over-simplify a message of universality. Instead they respect, allow for and celebrate differences just as they do the same for our points of commonality. Neither is sacrificed to the other. They don’t tell the lie to children that we’re all the same, but they do nurture connections. Communities are not homogenised, but nor are they imagined as inhabiting separate worlds. The ‘universality’ of these stories feels real and somehow more genuinely respectful of what ‘multiculturalism’ is, or at least should be.

10,000 Dresses

Marcus Ewert and Rex Ray

Over recent years, Letterbox Library has come across a small handful of picture books that explore transgender identities (there are more in the way of young adult novels), but to date, just one – *10,000 Dresses* (2008) – has been ‘approved’ for our shelves by our review team. *10,000 Dresses* stands out for what it is not. It is not schmaltzy, pitying or despairing. Crucially, it is also not from the perspective of an anxious or protective carer keen to elicit our sympathy and understanding of their child’s ‘problematic’ transgender identity. Instead in this picture book, despite the conventional third-person narrative voice, the ‘transgender’ child protagonist owns and propels the story.



10,000 Dresses delivers at quite a pace. A simple text drives forward an increasingly complex gender identity through deft turns, leaps and somersaults: we meet a child who, probably, ‘looks like a boy’; we hear that this child dreams of dresses so we shift our perspective to ‘looks like a girl’ – after all, the figure is fairly androgynous; next we hear the child’s androgynous name – Bailey – and we think we are probably still on the right track; on page 6 a pronoun is finally used and it is female so we settle down comfortably into our assumption; three pages later the child asks her/his mother for a dress and the reply is clear, ‘Bailey, what are you talking about? You’re a boy. Boys don’t wear dresses’; Bailey insists, ‘But I don’t feel like a boy’ – and so it goes on.

The revelation of Bailey’s identity is stark, bold and unapologetic. More than this, for the rest of the story, the text simply embraces Bailey’s view of her identity. In the face of family members who are variously appalled by Bailey’s gender declarations, the narrative dignifies, respects and values Bailey’s own firm sense of identity. The adult reader will likely stumble, but the narrative persists smoothly and resolutely with its female pronouns in relation to Bailey. Finally, with ease and with no complications, it simply refers to Bailey as a girl.

This dignifying of and belief in Bailey's point of view is embellished by illustrations that are clearly a visualising of *her* world – with the hostile family members we see only the backs of them or vast disembodied body parts (a hand, legs), which seem to shrink Bailey, but when she meets Laurel we see the two girls in full, side by side, facing out and facing the reader. Likewise, the jewelled magical dresses that Bailey dreams up seem to suffuse the book, dripping into surfaces that shimmer, and the odd word that is suddenly illuminated and sparkles in a different font colour.

A wonderful book for exploring transgender identities or gender per se, this book is also emphatically *not* about a transgender identity – Bailey is telling you she simply *is* a girl and she invites you into her world, her speak, her dreams. You may feel at first that you need to make the jump, but if you do make the connection that Bailey and the story want you to make, then you will be rewarded with a journey that is fluid, easy and, ultimately, joyful.

Notes

- 1 The Little Rebels award is a new award that recognises radical fiction for children aged 0–12. The award was created by the Alliance of Radical Booksellers and is administered by Letterbox Library. It is now in its second year.

All the books mentioned are available from Letterbox Library.

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[Letterbox Library is a 31-year-old, not-for-profit children's bookseller specialising in diversity and inclusion. It has been nominated by IBBY UK for this year's Astrid Lindgren Memorial award. Fen Coles is a co-director at Letterbox Library.]

Students' Reading Histories

Pam Dix

I teach during the second-year module on Children's Literature as part of a BEd Studies course. At the start of the course the students are required to write their personal reading histories. These are often moving accounts either of positive transformational reading experiences or of difficulties to be overcome. The students come from diverse backgrounds and many are from ethnic minority communities. Here are some of their stories.

Student 1

This story began 23 years ago when I was born. Since I was a little girl my mum had great problems putting me to bed (and keeping me there). I was a very lively and curious child. My mum tried lots of different things: singing (and it included anything from school rhymes to army songs to the top of the charts), puppet theatre and reading. I loved my bedtime story. My mum would make noises and change voices and it was all very much alive in my imagination. That was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. I love my books. From the moment I got old enough I started asking my mum what each letter was, then words, and eventually I COULD READ.

Student 2

The books I grew up reading although old were in good condition. I recently bought a Famous Five book [Enid Blyton, 1942–1963] and I was fascinated at how crisp the pages were! Having the opportunity to buy a brand new ‘classic’ made me realise that I’d an idea in my head of what books were supposed to feel like and smell like, and it actually took me a while to get past that preconception and accept that a book doesn’t need to be old to be good.

Student 3

The first time I encountered books was at a very young age, mainly picture books with many illustrations and simple texts. I remember *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* [Eric Carle, 1969], *Funnybones* [Allan and Janet Ahlberg, 1980] and *Not Now, Bernard* [David McKee, 1980]. In primary school the shift from picture books to novels was a complete change and outside my comfort zone. I felt intimidated and that the books I liked were not meant for my age. ... I was categorised as below the national average and had to attend reading sessions on my own ... this increased my anxiety. ... In secondary school I remember going to the library at lunchtime out of boredom and began reading the *Goosebumps* [R.L. Stine, 1992–1997] that were on the shelf. After reading this I gained confidence in reading and began reading books such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* [1952] that consisted of personal experiences of people from different backgrounds. The stereotypical view of picture books at that time brought me down and I have recently explored complicated picture books that are for a more mature audience. Because of my personal account I am able to acknowledge some of the anxieties that children face.

Student 4

I remember my brother taking me to the library when I was four years old. It was a very difficult time for us as we had just lost our mother, and father was always working to pay the bills, so my teenage brother used to pick me up from nursery and we would go to the library with his school friends. He would take me to the children’s section upstairs and I remember he chose a book called *Where’s Spot* [Eric Hill, 1986], the popular yellow dog with black spots. I still remember how exciting he made it for me.

Student 5

I didn’t have many books as a child and made full use of my library card. If I was not at home or in school you would probably find me in the library. Every Saturday my Nan would give us pocket money and take us into town to spend it. I always used to go the charity shop and hunt for new books to read. This is where I first discovered Enid Blyton, *Five on a Treasure Island* [1942]. My Nan told me it had been her favourite book when she was young. It was 20p so I decided to buy it. I was probably eight at this point. I went home and got stuck in and I loved it [and] went on to read every other Enid Blyton book I could find. ... As I have grown up I have continued my love of reading. I read with my own child every night. However, I do not have the imagination I used to and cannot see things as vividly.

Student 6

In primary school reading became more of a chore than a pleasure. ... I feel like I’ve missed out on so much, since in my later childhood I neglected reading. Now I feel like I have to catch up, so as soon as I finish an assignment I pick up a classic that I missed out on. I know what it is like to be a discouraged reader so I expect it to be my job to help those children overcome the same barriers I faced. Reading is so important for children because a book can teach so much.

Student 7

I don't remember a lot about primary school but reading is the one thing that I do remember. We had to read one book every week from the school library but I was reading them at the rate of one every three days and had quickly read them all. My parents were then called in to discuss what to do as the school had a small selection of what were referred to as 'older kids' books' but were unsure if they wanted me reading them. They said it was ok.

Student 8

In the beginning I read story books and the poems of famous Urdu writers. I remember when my dad bought three books for me and I was really pleased to see them. They were full with beautiful pictures. I still remember I found it hard to understand some words and my mother helped me. She told me to read aloud as this helped me to learn proper grammar and pronunciation. I remember that the name of the writers were Syed Imtiaz Ali and Dr Iqbal.

Student 9

Having had a very traumatic childhood, reading tended to be my only source of comfort. It enabled me to escape a very bleak life and immerse myself into one adventure or another. I am aware that I have been able to read since around the age of four. I spent a lot of my early years in Jamaica and schools came down pretty hard on you if your reading was not up to par. On arrival back in England I noticed that books were freely available and I was able to broaden my choice. I became drawn to stories about children from poor families such as *A Necklace of Raindrops* [1968] by Joan Aiken and *Pippi Longstocking* [1954] by Astrid Lindgren. It gave me hope that there was a light at the end of the tunnel even for those in tragic situations and I felt that I could relate to the characters.

Student 10

I was an avid reader but was not really surrounded by books at home. I have one memory of a book that I remember reading. The book was called *Dracula's Daughter* [Hoffman, 1985]. I remember reading it everywhere even though it was not a very long book. I remember not having much time for reading due to daily Arabic classes so whenever I did get a few minutes, I was reading the book – on the steps in the living room, in bed – and I read it more than once.

Student 11

I remember my older brother, [my] sister and I being really quite capable readers even at a young age, and I recall being the most fluent reader in my year group. I hope that I can attribute this to being encouraged and exposed to reading from a young age, and hope to bestow the same skill and influence upon my own daughter. As I grew older and graduated into the reading of chapter books, the only ones that really stick out in my memory are the Jacqueline Wilson books, the first one I read being *The Suitcase Kid* [1992]. Even as a child, I really appreciated her way of tackling quite serious issues and situations and telling them from the perspective of the child. I'm not sure whether these issues were always ones I could relate my personal experience to, but I more feel that perhaps it was to do with being curious about such un-talked-about issues that drove my interest. Saying this, there were events in my life that were probably helped by these articles of literature, for instance the breakdown of my parent's marriage and therefore the parental separation of our home life. Similarly to how my friends, and I and I'm sure many other children, relished reading magazine problem pages, I think that these books lifted the lid on issues that we were, so to speak, dying to know about. Children, especially pre-teens are inquiring beings and I definitely remember this being a driving force behind some of my literary choices and tastes. This kind of

curiosity and need for more gritty, controversial content within teenage literature is something that Melvin Burgess (author) [embodies].

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- [Pam Dix, former head of a school library service, has taught both undergraduate and postgraduate children's literature courses in the Education Department at London Metropolitan University for seven years. She is on the Education Group of the Poetry Archive, is Chair of IBBY UK, and also of the Akili Trust, a charity that supports libraries and education in rural Kenya.]

Translation as a Bridge

BJ Epstein

When I give talks to young students, reading groups and general public audiences, I usually ask whether people read translated literature. The answer is generally no, or else a confused 'I'm not sure. How would I know?' The audience almost always seems puzzled that I would even ask that, as though they had never considered the value or point of reading translations.

At that stage in the conversation, I like to ask if anyone there has read work for children or adults by, say, Leo Tolstoy, Astrid Lindgren, Italo Calvino, Johanna Spyri, Sappho, Gustave Flaubert, Wisława Szymborska, Cornelia Funke, Yrsa Sigurdardottir, Andrea Camilleri or Franz Kafka. Inevitably, of course, the answer is yes.

So the surprising news for these people is that they do read translations, and that they do so fairly regularly, even if they aren't aware of it.

The obvious question then is, quite simply, 'Why?' Why should we be reading translated literature? What can we possibly get from it that we can't get from literature written in our native tongue? And aren't there so many books written in our own language that we don't need to move on to another culture's canon? Who has the time or need for all these books?

Translation is a bridge. Translation literally allows us to move a text from one language to another, but on a larger scale. It metaphorically gives us a chance to peek into and

learn from a different way of thinking, living, seeing and being. It's a bridge between islands of cultures and ideas.

The Russian writer Alexander Pushkin was quoted as saying (in Russian, of course), 'translators are the post horses of enlightenment'. What I take this statement to mean is that if we look only to our own language, culture and literature, we end up being very internally focused. We stagnate and don't grow. It's easy to forget that there are other ways of doing things. It's easy to slip into habits and to think that those habits are how everyone, everywhere, in all circumstances, should live. But if we get access to texts from other cultures, we suddenly are reminded anew that actually there is no one right way of living. There are other beliefs, other perspectives, other habits, and they're equally valid and they have much to teach us. Translations enlighten us, bringing us news from other societies, and forcing us to rethink some of our own opinions and values.

Another benefit of reading translated texts is that they bring us closer to people who we might have thought were 'other'. We realise that even if we disagree with someone's way of life or way of understanding the world, we still have a lot in common. On a basic level, everyone around the world has to eat, sleep, study, work and love. We all have friends, relatives and partners. We all need to find ways of occupying ourselves and earning a living. Sure, our relationships might look different, or the foods we eat might not be the same, or we might pray to varying gods or no gods at all, but at our core, we're simply all humans, trying to get through our lives as best we can. Reading about people in other countries and cultures helps us to keep that in mind. The other doesn't feel quite so other anymore. In my idealistic worldview, translations, like bridges, bring us closer, and we might be less likely to distrust, hate, fight with, or even kill people in other countries if we see that we truly are all people with the same needs and desires.

While translations matter to us all, I think that for children in particular, they are extremely important. Children need to be exposed to a wide array of experiences, types of person and points of view. They need to see beyond what their parents and teachers tell them and what their neighbourhood or school offers them. They need to know what opportunities, what selves, are out there. They need to be encouraged to live broad, diverse lives. Literature in general provides this sort of understanding, but again, translations are especially beneficial because they are both culturally specific and universal. A child in the UK who reads only about other British children will have quite a narrow understanding of the world, but a child in the UK who reads about children in the UK as well as about children in China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Israel, Angola, Peru, Iceland and so on, will probably be a child who wants to see the world, to try new things and to meet people from different backgrounds.

It's worrying that even today few English-speaking publishers take a chance on translated literature, especially translated books for children. I've been in touch with various publishers about some of my favourite Swedish books that I wish existed in English only to be told, 'No one wants to read that' or 'Children can't relate to people in other countries' or 'Who would ever buy such a book?' These publishers underestimate children – we know that children more so than adults are relentlessly curious and open – and these publishers do them a great disservice too. It is adults who teach children to see divisions, barriers and differences, and it is we adults who can stop teaching them that, too; translation is one way of accomplishing that.

As a translator, I feel as though my job is to slip on my author's skin to the greatest extent possible, and to allow readers of my translation to get close to the original text and to the culture that informs it. So not only is the translated text a bridge from culture to culture, but I myself also serve as a bridge, trying to make that author's words and ideas available to a new audience in a new context. I want to help make connections, help create meetings between people and cultures.

We need translations in order to strengthen existing bridges between groups of people as well as to build new ones. It's time we demand that publishers produce more translations. But we also need to be aware of when we are reading translations, which is more often than we might think, and we should make an effort to choose translations when we are in libraries and bookshops. If we are buying a book for a child, we might want to consider a translated text, and we might thus engage that child reader in a discussion about what is similar and different between cultures, and what we might learn from others.

So, how often do you read translated literature? Is it more often than you imagine? It is nonetheless less frequent than you might like? How often do you offer translated texts to the children you teach, work with at the library, raise, or otherwise interact with? What do they learn from these books?

Let's consider the importance of translated books and let's get building bridges.

[BJ Epstein is Senior Lecturer in Literature and Public Engagement at the University of East Anglia, as well as a writer, editor and translator from the Scandinavian languages to English. Her book *Are the Kids all Right?*, which is about LGBTQ books for children and young adults, was published in October 2013. She has also published a book on EFL and a book on translating children's literature, edited two books on translation in the Nordic countries and translated a number of other works. More information about her can be found at <http://awaywithwords.se/>.]

When Children Psychologically Cross the Bridge: Growing up through the Stage of Liminality

Tomoko Masaki

Introduction

Everybody is expected to encounter psychologically painful experiences from their birth and throughout their life. They may meet with unforeseen misfortunes, but they have to face periods of liminality in order to face up to the challenges of life. Liminality means the period or the stage of transition from one state to another.

The term 'liminality' originates from anthropological studies of rites of passage such as the transition from childhood to adulthood. Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (1960) writes as follows.

Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death. (p.3)

Gennep's original work was published in 1909, more than 100 years ago. But even today we can accept all these life stages as important passages in life. And from living in modernised Japan, I can add some other stages: entering into nursery school, elementary school, high school and university, transferring between schools and offices, retirement and aging. All these stages are certainly 'looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence'. Passing through these stages, though some are accompanied by sentiments of happiness, often involves suffering or distress.

Thus, we are to have several periods of liminality in the long passage of life. In this article, however, I would like to focus on children in their early childhood, and I would like to concentrate on one picture book in particular, *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (1957), with illustrations by Marcia Brown, an American picture-book artist. This was

originally one of a number of folk tales collected by Norwegian folk-tale collectors, Peter Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe.

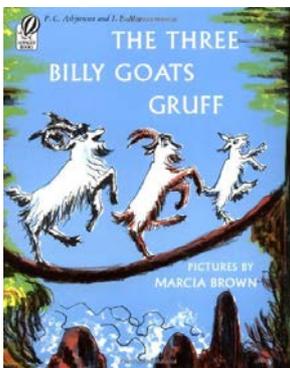
The Story of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*

Let me take you through the story of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. The three billy goats called 'Gruff' tried to cross a bridge one by one from one bank to another. Under the bridge lived 'a great ugly troll with eyes as big as saucers and a nose as long as a poker'. The first two goats confronted the troll (the troll), but were not mature enough to overcome it head to head. They did just manage to pass the bridge using the best of their abilities. When the third goat managed to cross the bridge, I interpret this as facing up to and surviving the passage from one life stage to another, finding his new status in a new society. Young people, migrants in their existence, are expected to cross rivers, that is, go through trials, to attain reintegration.

The hungry goats have to cross the bridge and climb to the meadow in order to survive. But lurking under the bridge is a frightening troll. What does the troll represent for the goats? Marcia Brown presents the troll as something terrible, lying in wait, standing in our way, catching us and taking our lives.

The troll, I feel, is the personification of the severe Scandinavian nature, or a trial in life. The picture book as a medium represents embodied figures instead of abstract or symbolical concepts. Its pages are full of humans, creatures and beings, embodying the trials and experiences a child meets along his/her journey through childhood. If represented images do not imply deep metaphorical meanings, a picture book can't be valued as a successful one.

The Three Billy Goats and the Bridge: A Relationship Representing their Growth



The Three Billy Goats Gruff with pictures by Marcia Brown, was published in 1957 in the USA and translated into Japanese in 1965. Since then the Japanese version has become quite well-known and has been read aloud to children at home, nursery schools, elementary schools and libraries.

Now I'll go through the scenes in which each billy goat tries to cross the bridge. These scenes represent the relationship between the billy goats and the bridge, eventually showing the gradual growth of the billy goats.

When the first billy goat is crossing the bridge, the long, long bridge is drawn across two pages with both ends off the sides of the page. The length of the bridge is the psychological length of the bridge for this billy goat. He looks small, white and frail. His legs are thin and weak. But he is trying to strengthen himself, stretching his legs while struggling forward. The bridge goes 'trip, trap! trip, trap!' as he walks.

Both the length of the bridge shown in the picture and the sound of the bridge made by each goat indicates the relationship of each goat with the bridge: the length of the bridge shows how each goat sees the bridge, depending on his stage of growth; the sound made by the bridge shows how the bridge feels for each goat's size and weight each time. Though the sound is made by the bridge, it can be the sound of each goat's heart.

When the second billy goat crosses the bridge, it looks shorter to him than for the first billy goat. We can see the bank on the right side in the illustration. The second billy goat doesn't look so small and feeble as the first billy goat. He is depicted as bright brown and walking steadily. The bridge goes 'trip, trap! trip, trap! trip, trap!' One more 'trip, trap!' than for the first billy goat, with this billy goat walking on the bridge more freely and more confidently.

When the third billy goat crosses the bridge, the bridge doesn't look the same as before, it looks twisted as if it's in pain due to the big size, heavy weight and energetic

spirit of the third billy goat. The bridge goes ‘t-r-i-p, t-r-a-p! t-r-i-p, t-r-a-p! t-r-i-p, t-r-a-p!’ The bridge is heaving a groan.

Thus, in reality the length of the bridge is always the same, but the psychological relationship between the billy goats and the bridge makes the artist change her depiction of the bridge. Marcia Brown could sense how the three billy goats feel when they cross the bridge and, at the same time, she also could sense how the bridge feels when the billy goats cross it. As the billy goats grow older, they become big, strong and powerful. When they are old enough, they can cross the bridge with self-assurance.

The Three Billy Goats and the Troll: The Relationship between the Three Billy Goats and the Trials

The troll appears crouching under the bridge, in the rocky mountainside on one side of the river. From the other side the three billy goats are watching the mountain and the bridge somewhat nervously. The troll has opened his right eye because he has noticed the billy goats approaching. The troll seems to be a keeper of the bridge. He is watching anybody who crosses.

When the first billy goat tries to cross the bridge, the contrast between the tiny billy goat and the big troll clearly shows the difference between them. The goat is not only tiny but feeble; the big troll’s head occupies one whole page. He is dark brown and black with a long nose, big eyes, and jagged teeth that seem able to crunch anything. The troll seems to overwhelm the little billy goat.

When the second billy goat crosses the bridge, the troll is putting his big gnarly fingers on the planks of the bridge, so the second billy goat is literally face-to-face with the troll. Though he is actually frightened by the troll, he seems cunningly to hide his feelings.

When we compare the third billy goat with the troll, the troll is still bigger than the goat. However, compared with this billy goat, who is full of spirit, the troll, looking thick headed and leaning backward, is losing the confrontation. In a later illustration, the goat, full of himself, is dashing forward to confront the troll, bursting with confidence, while the troll stands weakly not knowing what to do. We know who will win.

When the troll roars ‘Who’s that tramping over my bridge?’, the third billy goat answers ‘It’s I! the Big Billy Goat Gruff!’ in his own ugly hoarse voice. (Here the words ‘ugly’ and ‘hoarse’ imply his voice has changed during puberty.) He announces himself as proudly as he can. He can’t retreat from here and he can’t avoid engaging in a battle. He makes up his mind to face the difficulty by himself. He challenges the troll with all his might and he wins.

Having analysed the relationship between the billy goats and the troll through the picture-book narrative, I can tell this folk tale is the story about the billy goats growing mentally and physically. The third billy goat at first appears as a tiny weak creature, then he becomes bigger, and lastly he becomes strong and self-confident.

What is the role of the troll? What does the bridge mean? If the billy goats can cross over the bridge easily, smoothly and without mishap, that is, if they live an easy life and never face hurdles and difficulties, they may not know how to confront hardships by themselves. The troll is the keeper of the bridge and his presence in itself gives the bridge importance. The troll is the trial that we all can meet through our long life journey.

When the third billy goat is too small and weak, he knows very well that he is not big enough to go face to face with the troll and engages him in a battle. He has to wait a while for himself to become confident mentally and physically enough to be able to rely on himself. For some mothers who have read this folk tale, the first two goats are deceiving and selfish. I do not think so. Actually they are using the best of their abilities

to achieve their goals. It also can be said that when they are very small, they feel they can depend on someone else, for example, parents or elder siblings.

How Child Readers Appreciate this Picture Book

I have been running my own private library for more than 40 years, a so-called 'bunko', a unique Japanese-style home or private library organised by volunteers, especially by mothers, in order to make a library-like space for children in their neighbourhoods. I live in the northern part of Osaka, western Japan, and run my own bunko with the help of other mothers. The experience, sharing picture books with children from newly borns to those around 12 years old, has taught me how children can appreciate picture books, sometimes how easily they can enter into the picture-book world and how deeply they can live in this world. One of the picture books that greatly impressed me through sharing picture books with them was *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*.

When I read the picture book *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* by myself, I thought this was the story of 'three billy goats' because the title said 'three billy goats'. I asked other people (mothers, nursery school teachers and librarians) how many billy goats are in the story. All of them mentioned 'three'.

I have read the picture book many times to children from three years old to around five years old. Almost all of them seem to take this as a story of one billy goat instead of three. In the story and picture-book time in my private library, when I read picture books aloud to children, they are listening to me and they are looking at the illustrations in the picture book. They can enjoy and combine two texts (pictorial and verbal) at the same time and they can create the third text, that is, their own narrative.

When the picture book is introduced to them and when they look at the tiny white billy goat, they find a connection with this goat. They are going to cross the bridge nervously with a feeling of anxiety of the troll's presence. Expressions on their faces and their body language tell me that they have stepped into his hooves. Then, as the bigger billy goat, they are going to cross the bridge less nervously, rather freely and a little confidently. At last, when they look at the picture of the climax (the big head of the biggest billy goat) and they hear his ugly hoarse voice 'It's I! the Big Billy Goat Gruff', they become the biggest billy goat themselves and puff out their chests proudly like the goat in the picture book. They emerge from their chrysalises and transform into the stage of being a big boy/girl or the stage of youth. Even three-year-old children follow the narrative, living the passage from the tiny creature to the biggest and, at the end, their faces and bodies show their proud feelings that is 'It's I!'

When they finally announce 'It's I!', they notice more or less the flow of time: past, present and future. Reading a picture book like *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* from cover to cover (even if the book is read to them), they are aware of the passage of time. They realise that they have been brought up by parents or carers in the past, now they are in the present, and they will confront trials in the future.

The Three Billy Goats Gruff is one of the best picture books to show symbolically the passage of liminality that children confront in their early stage of life. I think, however, the theme of the picture book is shared by people in any stage of life. I hope this picture book stays and lives in them, sustains them and helps them in their long life. Marcia Brown writes in her book, *Lotus Seeds* (1986),

The children looked beyond the horror to the battle between moral forces. The heritage of childhood is the sense of life bequeathed to it by the folk wisdom of the ages. To tell in pictures, to tell in words, to tell in dance – however we may choose – it is a privilege to pass these truths on to children who have a right to the fullest expression we can give them. (p.31)

Conclusion

I have been interested in the theory of liminality because this theory gives me a key to understand the problems that we confront in Japan. Nowadays, seemingly, children have not grown up decently and properly. It is a custom in Japan for local governments to have coming-of-age ceremonies in January each year. Girls dress up gorgeously in Japanese kimonos. It's heart-warming to see the happy young people. However, though they have grown into adulthood physically, their manners and behaviour tell us that they haven't matured mentally or that they haven't attained an adult's mind. For example, they drink irresponsibly, get tipsy and become noisy. They do not seem to have attained adulthood: that they have responsibilities as a member forming a social life.

Natsuki Okamoto, developmental psychologist, writes in his book, *Early Childhood: Young Children Understand the World* (2005), that one of the reasons why there are so many social problems is due to these people missing out on an early childhood. He says that people need to live their own early childhood to the fullest and properly or they can't grow to maturity. Today parents get too much information from various types of medium about how to bring up their children cleverly, so parents want to prepare the smoothest passages possible for their children from their early childhood to adulthood. Children are always prepared for walking easy roads, without confronting any difficulties. In short, their parents don't consider that they will come across liminality.

Children will learn by falling over stones. They need to pass through the periods of liminality or they will never be able to cross the bridge over the deep mountain river by themselves.

Arnold van Gennep in his book *The Rites of Passage* (1960) conceptualises liminality as the middle step of three: separation, liminality and reintegration. In the process of liminality, first people are independently separate of other members, then they try to meet the trial of becoming their age by themselves, finally they succeed in the battle with themselves (p.10).

The anthropologist Victor Turner writes in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969):

The attributes of liminality is necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classification that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. (p.95)

'Liminality' can refer to any 'betwixt and between' situation, as given in *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* (2006). They actually are 'between', that is, they on the bridge linking this bank or that bank.

Young people are migrants as an inevitable consequence in their lives. They are expected to progress from one situation to another or from one social world to another. People are born to face up to their own liminality from their birth to death.

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[Tomoko Masaki is a Japanese researcher of picture books and is head of the Research Center for Picture Books in Osaka. Her special interest is transitional, representational and comparative images in picture books in time and space. She was awarded a Harvey Darton award by the Children's Books History Society in 2008 for *A History of Victorian Popular Picture Books: The Aesthetic, Creative and Technological Aspects of the Toy Book through the Publications of the Firm of Routledge, 1852–1893*, Tokyo: Kazamo-Shobo, 2006. 2 vols.]

REVIEWS

Picture Books

The Cake

Dorothee de Monfreid, trans. Linda Burgess, Wellington, NZ: Gecko Press, hb. 978 1 8775 7945 5, £9.99, 2014, 32pp.

Dorothee de Monfreid was born in France and lives in Paris. Before she began writing and illustrating children's books she was a graphic designer. She is best known for her illustrations in the picture book *I Really Want to Eat a Child* (Sylviane Donnio, London: Hodder Children's, 2008).

Tiger is hanging out with his animal friends. 'I'm hungry!' he declares. 'Me too!' agree Dog, Rabbit, Monkey and Bear in turn. 'Let's make a chocolate cake' suggests Tiger, taking the lead, but they can't agree on what kind of cake to bake – 'bone-banana-carrot-fishcake!' suggest Tiger's mates. 'NO WAY!' yells Tiger. Their disagreements end up with name-calling and an enormous food fight.

'You're REVOLTING!' yell the animal friends to Tiger.

'I'll EAT YOU!' bellows Tiger back, baring his large pointy teeth.

The frightened friends run from Tiger, leaving him all alone, but later return carrying the same delicious chocolate cake seen on the front cover. Tiger is ecstatic to see his friends – and the cake. He opens his arms to welcome them ...

'SURPRISE!' – laugh the friends in unison.

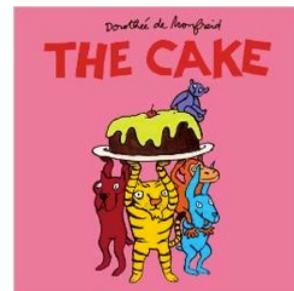
Have they finally agreed to give Tiger his wish for chocolate cake? Will the friends all sit down together and share the cake as in all good moral tales? No spoiler from this reviewer.

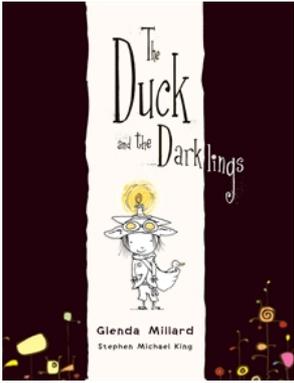
The tone and visual style of the book is bright, funny and in cartoon style, complete with big speech bubbles. The generous square pages are saturated with vivid cake-icing colours. Deep strawberry, marshmallow pink, custard, pistachio and chocolate browns sit behind the black outlines of the animals – the matt colour bleeds off the edges of the pages. The outsize white speech bubbles lift the whole design – and are particularly emotionally effective with their spiky outlines and handwritten font in varying sizes. The direct speech gives lots of scope for fun with character voices when reading aloud.

The Cake is a naughty, irreverent tale that children will love, but not all adults. The final outcome is hilarious, with a true twist in the tale, but it will polarise opinion. In the end, it felt a little unkind.

The front-cover image shows the five friends all joining together in a circle, bearing the cake aloft – such teamwork! But oddly, this doesn't reflect anything of what really happens inside the book – never judge a book by its cover!

Carol Thompson





The Duck and the Darklings

Glenda Millard, illus. Stephen Michael King, London: Allen & Unwin, hb. 978 1 7433 6298 3, £9.99, 2014, 32pp.

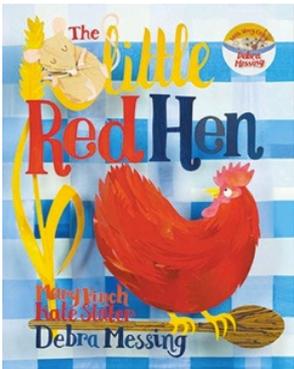
Peterboy lives with his grandfather in an alternative universe where there is no light. The Earth has also lost all its flowers and trees. Humans live underground. Peterboy and the other children, known as Darklings, must scavenge for objects on the old mechanical wasteland, which the reader presumes to be a dump, for the fragments of the technology humankind has lost. The Darklings all have to wear a candle hat when they are out and about, to see where they are going. One day Peterboy comes across an injured duck. As anyone would in a children's story, Peterboy decides to take the duck home, though he knows his grandfather won't be pleased. The rest of the story concerns the developing relationship between the grandfather, the grandson and the ailing duck.

Millard's book is an ecological manifesto, emphasising what damage humans are doing to their own environment through mistreating animals and nature. However the tone of the book is optimistic: it's not too late to put things right.

The pitfall for any author attempting a book like Millard's is to deliver worthy messages while avoiding an overtly didactic tone. I have noticed that few things turn young readers off more strongly than a preachy authorial voice. Millard has a technique for avoiding didacticism: she coins terms. A trumpet becomes a tootle. Instead of forgetting something, her characters 'disremember'. Using terms like these Millard pins the messages to the characters in the story rather than to an invisible but ubiquitous author.

Stephen Michael King's illustrations are suitably subterranean and sombre. His occasional patches of colour stand out like beacons.

Rebecca R. Butler



The Little Red Hen

Mary Finch, illus. Kate Slater, narrated by Debra Messing, Oxford: Barefoot Books, hb. with CD, 978 1 8468 6575 6, £10.99, 2013, 32pp.

This is an anthropomorphic morality story. A little red hen lives with a mouse and a rooster in a surprisingly affluent-looking cottage, though it seems to be assembled from ill-fitting components left over from other buildings.

The hen finds a seed of wheat and plans to make bread. She needs help planting the seed. Will the mouse and the rooster help? The answer is negative. When the wheat stem grows, the hen needs help harvesting it. She gets the same dusty answer from the mouse and the rooster. The same routine repeats itself over transporting the wheat to the mill, milling the wheat, kneading the dough and baking the bread. Every time the plea for help is refused.

The only task in which the mouse and the rooster willingly take part is the eating of the bread. However, the inducement of fresh bread makes them see the error of their ways and they will in future fulfil their parts in the bread-making project – and maybe other projects too.

There are two morals to this story. For the little red hen the moral is that diligence can encourage helpers to join the cause. For the rooster and the mouse the moral is that if you want the benefits of a project you have to share the burden of earning them.

There are three interesting points about this publication. Slater's illustrations look as if they might have been designed with a big screen in mind. They would make an interesting stop-motion short movie for preschool children. Finch's story also offers a clear explanation of the recipe for making bread, offering teachers or parents an

opportunity to step out into a practical cross-curricular channel. Thirdly, the provision of the aforementioned CD brings the story within the scope of children who have visual or reading difficulties, an example that I should like other publishers to follow in coming years; bravo!

Rebecca R. Butler

Little Red Riding Hood

Katie Cotton, illus. Alison Jay, Dorking: Templar, hb. 978 1 8487 7873 3, £12.99, 2013, 32pp.

Alison Jay is credited with the entire creation of this classic fairy tale, but close inspection reveals that the rewriter is Katie Cotton. Cotton's version is definitely wolf-friendly, and as well as saving Little Red Riding Hood from the fate she suffers in the Perrault version, she also sends the wolf off in a cage with the Huntsman, sparing the animal the broiling inflicted by the Grimms in their various retellings. Mrs Hood runs a teashop in Fairytale Village, and made her daughter the hooded cloak in which the girl sets off to her grandmother's cottage in the woods with some of her mother's baking.

Jay's style has a retro look, both in the figures she draws, which remind us of a stylised 1950s world, and in the crackle-glazed effect on each spread. Greens and browns predominate (except for the cloak, of course). There is a great sense of movement across the spreads, and a clever use of different sizes and designs of typeface to indicate the wolf's words. The real delight of Jay's vision of the story, however, is her intertextual references to other well-known fairy tales, where we can spot other fairy-tale characters through the windows of the teashop and grandmother's cottage. We can see Rapunzel's tower and the Emperor in his new clothes, the Three Little Pigs and the Princess and the Pea, Enormous Turnips and Gingerbread Men, Little Red Hen and other characters carefully hidden among the trees and in the streets. The dark woodlands and the intertextuality remind us a little of some of Anthony Browne's work. Through each of the pages we also follow the story of Hansel and Gretel, entirely visually, with no written reference to it. The wealth of fairy-tale allusion makes this a wonderful book for early years foundation stage readers to spot the characters and talk about their stories.

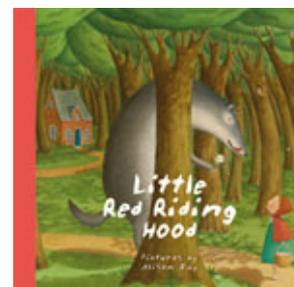
Bridget Carrington

Novels, Tales and Stories

A-Maze-ing Minotaur

Juliet Rix, illus. Juliet Snape, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0431 0, £11.99, 2014, 32pp.

As a teacher years ago, I introduced nine-year-old Key Stage 2 pupils to the ancient myth of Theseus and the Minotaur by means of Ian Serraillier's *The Way of Danger: The Story of Theseus* (illus. William Stobbs, London: Oxford University Press, 1962) and this proved to be very popular. Alongside, we examined Minoan art and culture, and had fun with various word searches and maze puzzles based on characters in the text. Now, younger Key Stage 1 readers can have easy access to this gripping tale, thanks to the combined efforts of freelance writer Juliet Rix and the talented illustrator Juliet Snape. They have chosen an amusing punning title 'A-Maze-ing Minotaur' and allowed the pictures to dominate with many double-page spreads and simple, clearly printed text boxes. One exception is the final pages when 'the truth behind the story' is revealed, with a useful map, accompanying facts and an illustration of Knossos palace itself as it appears to visitors to Crete today. The end papers delightfully echo Minoan wall paintings of moving bulls, while the front cover shows Theseus's fight with the enormous Minotaur, emphasising with shadows the contrast in size as the monster



towers above the brave young prince. An interactive plea ‘Help Theseus escape!’ appeals to young readers to find a way out of the complex maze.

King Minos, shown suitably commanding and cruel, keeps a strange, dangerous beast beneath his magnificent palace with its maze of narrow corridors known as the Labyrinth. Every nine years, seven young Athenian maids and young men are sacrificed to the Minotaur and not one escapes the Labyrinth. Young, brave Prince Theseus offers to sail to Crete with the victims to kill the Minotaur, and the night before his supposed doom meets King Minos’s beautiful daughter Princess Ariadne. They fall in love and she offers him a magic sword and a ball of golden thread so that he can retrace his steps and escape.

An effective device employed by Juliet Snape is to have two-thirds of the double-page illustrations for above ground and one-third below. In this way the reader can see the action in the palace whilst being able to see the Labyrinth and locate the lurking Minotaur. Theseus is shown distracted by a toppling amphora when he is only a few feet away from the monster around the corner.

The next page, which is the full version of the front-cover scene, is the climax of the tale, but, although it is exciting, it is not made too frightening and certainly nothing like Kevin Crossley-Holland’s terrifying depiction of Grendel in *Beowulf* (illus. Charles Keeping, Oxford University Press, 1982):

The Minotaur let out a mighty roar and Theseus screamed. Bull’s hair met boy’s skin, sword struck horn, arms and legs flailed everywhere. ...Then all went quiet.

We turn the page with relief to discover the Minotaur is on the ground, and the following pages show Theseus gratefully following the thread to safety. Reunited with the remaining Athenians, Princess Ariadne takes the rescued party to find their way to the ship and sea. After the grey stones of the underground, we see the young couple embrace with their joyful passengers aboard the Athenian craft in bright sunshine, leaving behind Crete and Knossos palace.

This book could easily be shared with very young readers and makes the myth readily accessible.

Susan Bailes

The Classics: Tales from Hans Christian Andersen

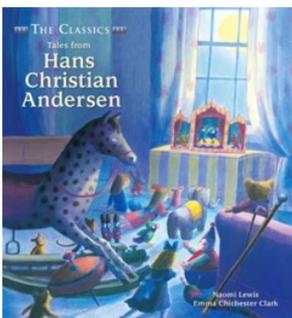
Naomi Lewis, illus. Emma Chichester Clark, London: Frances Lincoln Children’s Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0510 2, £12.99, 2014, 74pp.

The Classics: Tales from Grimm

Antonia Barber, illus. Margaret Chamberlain, London: Frances Lincoln Children’s Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0509 6, £12.99, 2014, 77pp.

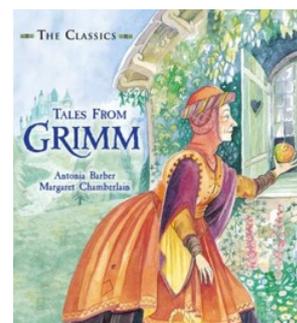
Two of the three volumes in Frances Lincoln’s The Classics series feature well-known fairy tales by the Grimms and Andersen. They are reductions of volumes that were originally published 20 years ago, but fully deserve their reintroduction, which brings masters of storytelling and illustration to twenty-first-century readers.

The delightful and constantly missed Naomi Lewis was an Andersen scholar of distinction, and her many versions of his work capture Andersen’s style perfectly. She made many different translations over the years for different audiences, and this book has a simple narrative aimed at younger readers, which nevertheless accurately reflects the full text of nine of his stories. There are old favourites – ‘The Little Match Girl’, ‘The Princess and the Pea’ and ‘The Nightingale’, but also several far less well-known stories such as ‘Little Ida’s Flowers’ and ‘Elf(in) Hill’.



Emma Chichester Clark's illustrations are typical of her work, with large-eyed children and adults (and splendid animals) in vibrant, active settings. Many of the images feature small, school-uniformed girls as protagonists in the tales.

Antonia Barber's work was brought to a wider audience when her novel *The Ghosts* (London: Cape, 1969) was adapted for the screen as *The Amazing Mr Blunden* (dir. Lionel Jeffries, 1972), but she is probably best known now for *The Mousehole Cat* (illus. Nicola Bayley, London: Walker, 2001). Her retelling of nine Grimm versions of old fairy tales is simple, but entirely within their nineteenth-century German style. Those who are familiar with fairy tales named 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'The Sleeping Beauty' may be surprised to discover them with their Grimm (and older) original titles 'Little Red-Cap' and 'Briar-Rose'. The Grimm wolf has a grim ending indeed, which Barber naturally retains, a feature as likely to delight young readers as to distress them. Margaret Chamberlain's illustrations are beautiful, daintily drawn and coloured, lively, often funny and set in the fairy-tale Middle Ages. Some of the images look as though they've crept from a medieval manuscript.



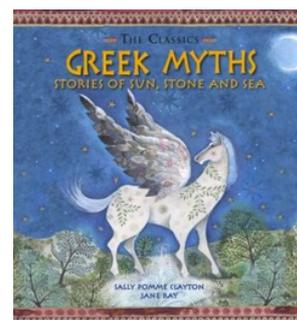
Each book has beautiful endpapers – the Grimm volume especially so – and a short introduction to explain the context of the original writer or collector of the stories and their publication.

Bridget Carrington

The Classics: Greek Myths Stories of Sun, Stone and Sea

Sally Pomme Clayton, illus. Jane Ray, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0508 9, 2014, £12.99, 80pp.

Give children a marvellous opportunity to be transported back in time to the enchanted world of Greek mythology by reading aloud this wonderful collection of stories of sun, stone and sea in this exquisitely illustrated volume. Following a helpful introduction, Sally Pomme Clayton has produced ten spellbinding tales that comprise: 'The Creation', 'Giants and Gods', 'Pandora, Athena and Poseidon', 'Perseus and Medusa', 'Pan and Midas', 'Pegasus', 'Atalanta', 'Orpheus and Eurydice', 'Apollo and Midas' and, lastly, 'Arachne'. I especially liked the way in which each chapter ends with a postscript informing the reader of significant modern places, artefacts and/or ideas linked with the tale. This is appealing as it brings the ancient myths directly into the reader's world. Take for example the Flying Horse (whose illustration graces the front cover) in which Bellerophon rode Pegasus and took on the chimera, a three-headed monster. His pride led him to think he could live with the gods, but this was not to be. Pegasus meanwhile flew up into the heavens and became a constellation of stars. The author explains a link with St George and the Dragon, and how Mount Chimera can be visited in southern Turkey where fire continually flickers and flashes. Sally Pomme Clayton never patronises her young readers and explains 'hubris' and what happens when a hero thinks he is more important than the gods.



A feature of this volume is the clear, vivid use of figurative language that is carefully chosen:

Apollo appeared and the crowd fell silent. His lyre rang out, tinkling and glittering. The sound rippled across the glade spreading like sunshine. The listeners felt warm, as if golden light had filled their hearts.

The high quality of the paper, smooth to the touch, the clear font and the artwork beautifully complement the tales.

Jane Ray has a distinctive style with her use of vibrant colour and decoration. Each chapter contains one full-page illustration with further framed smaller illustrations. They are all different, but have certain features in common. Jane Ray presents her figures with almond-shaped eyes and Middle Eastern features, and places them in

formal postures. In an interview in 2010 in *Carousel* (no. 46) with Chris Stephenson, she mentioned how she was inspired as a student of ceramics by the Egyptian art she encountered in the British Museum. She found this art aesthetically very beautiful, and noted how the feet always turned sideways. It is fascinating to see the range of borders and patterns that decorate her illustrations, none of which detracts from the main image but adds further interest. Even the terrifying Gorgon, Medusa, with her head of coiling snakes, shows imaginative, detailed patterns and spirals with worked colours. We admire the lapis lazuli blue skies and the use of gold, not unlike Brian Wildsmith's extravagant use of gold in his work. In the tale of Midas, the full-page illustration is dominated by gold, apart from a small framed view of lush vibrant life and greenery that his daughter is about to leave as she steps into the room. All the trees have specific patterned leaves and form distinct shapes, and there is a luminous quality to the illustrations.

This volume is excellent value and ends with a helpful index of the Greek gods and heroes as well as citing sources, once again taking the child recipient seriously. This beautiful work is a real treasure.

Susan Bailes

Pockety: The Tortoise who Lived as she Pleas

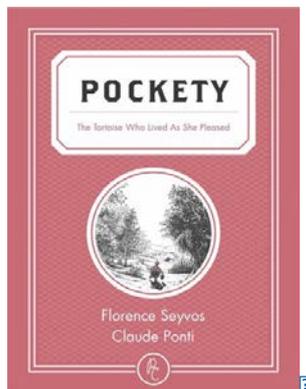
Florence Seyvos, illus. Claude Ponti, trans. Mika Provata-Carlone, London: Pushkin Children's Books, flapped pb. 978 1 7826 9025 2, £7.99, 2014, 64pp.

This relatively short tale is a translation of the French writer, Florence Seyvos, who rarely ventures into children's literature as she is best known for adult fiction and screenwriting in France. I have to confess that I did not succumb to the so-called charms of this tortoise tale and found it hard to share Pockety's grief when her partner, Thing, is killed suddenly by a falling stone. This is perhaps because this happens on page 2 before their relationship has been fully established. Ignoring this fundamental plot flaw, our heroine finds solace by writing notes to herself as if they came from her beloved. This device leads her to appreciate many aspects of life and enables her ultimately to come to terms completely with her loss.

Pockety encounters other creatures including a snail and another tortoise, as well as a hedgehog, and she is visited by her parents. The hedgehog makes delicious blueberry pancakes and after a journey she finds a lovely new home, a small cave where she settles happily.

The limited text is rescued in my opinion by the detailed black-and-white illustrations that are carefully executed. They convey a sense of humour as the little tortoise bravely walks through a tree-lined path with enormous branches towering over her. I found the names of the characters limited: Thing, Thingummy, Nestor and Pippin, along with Pockety's favourite granddaughter, Bubble. Perhaps something has been lost in translation? Nevertheless the tale has a positive message for the reader to be brave and cope with life's challenges.

Susan Bailes



Time to Read: Just Right for Young Readers

London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, paperbacks, reissued 2014, £4.99, 32pp.

Max and the Lost Note

Graham Marsh, 978 1 8478 0544 7, 2009.

Miss Fox

Simon Puttock, illus. Holly Swain, 978 1 8478 0545 4, 2006.

Flabby Tabby

Penny McKinlay, illus. Britta Teckentrup, 978 1 8478 0543 0, 2005.

Bumposaurus

Penny McKinlay, illus. Britta Teckentrup, 978 1 8478 0542 3, 2003.

These four previously published picture books have been designed as smaller-format early readers reissued by the publisher this year. The dates given above are the original publication dates as stated by the publisher. Note that the illustrations in these books sometimes have different dates from the text.

Max and the Lost Note is a story about a cat who is a musician. He is trying to finish composing a tune but can't finish it. He has lost a note: but where? He sets off on a quest to find his lost note, meeting some cool cats who are fellow musicians on the way. Marsh's illustrations are striking, in the manner of an anthropomorphic Yellow Submarine.

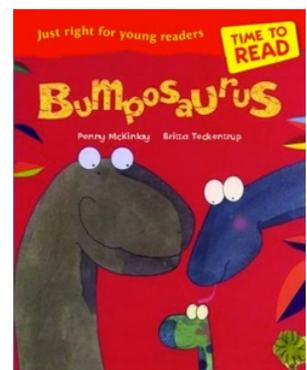
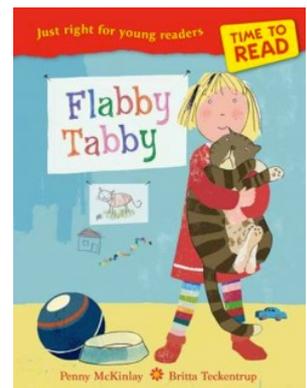
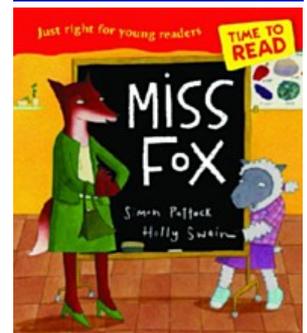
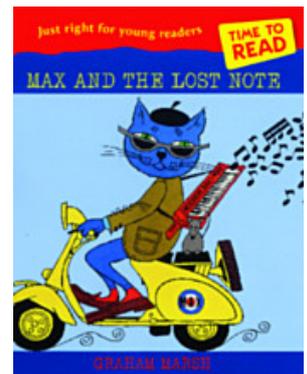
Miss Fox is a model schoolteacher, popular with all the students except one. Lily Lamb, for some unaccountable reason, remains suspicious of Miss Fox. How right she turns out to be. When the children are taken for a day out, the teacher reveals that she proposes to devour them. Lily foils the fox's evil plans. But Miss Fox moves on with her vulpine schemes to another town. Swain's illustrative skill turns the eyes of the fox into a frightening sight.

Tabby is a beloved cat who does nothing all day but sleep and eat. Tabby's family decide to get a kitten. The newcomer drives Tabby mad because it gets to the food first and has the appetite of a healthy growing animal. Diet and exercise have the predictable result. Tabby becomes slimmer. She and the kitten become friends. Teckentrup's illustrations are unmistakably influenced by Judith Kerr's *Mog*, and none the worse for that.

Bumposaurus is a physically and cognitively challenged dinosaur. He blunders into everything and mistakes a tree for his Dad. His impairment nearly gets him eaten by a T Rex. Then someone has a brainwave. Bumposaurus tries on the spectacles that his grandmother wears. (Why in children's books are impairments so often regarded as the domain of the aged?) He can see! Don't ask which dinosaurs learned to measure visual problems or shape lenses.

These books are a useful addition to the large range of early-reading books currently on offer. Each book carries on its back cover a list of the new words a reader might learn from the story.

Rebecca R. Butler



Novels for Teenagers and Young Adults

Stuffed

Miriam Halahmy, Thame: Albury Books, pb. 978 1 9099 5873 9, £6.99, 2014, 233pp.

Two years ago in *IBBYLink* I reviewed Miriam Halahmy's first two novels in a cycle set in and around Hayling Island. Universally praised for their treatment of teenage lives, and issues from the wider world that impact particularly on younger people, Halahmy's skill is now acknowledged by the choice of *Hidden* (London: Meadowside Children's, 2011) to appear in IBBY Ireland's new multicultural resource *Imaginations: Imagine Nations through Story* (www.imagenations.ie). *Stuffed* is the third in the cycle, its 18-month delay in publication serving only to make us even more thankful for its eventual appearance with a different publisher, Albury Books, who now have also republished the earlier two books, *Hidden* and *Illegal* (2014).

Stuffed is the story of Jess and Ryan, each of whom is now suddenly facing a dysfunctional future that they wish to keep secret from others. Jess has already suffered the fear of suspected cancer and now, having recovered, faces the dissolution of her comfortable family life while she is forced to keep her father's secrets from the rest of the family. A moment of sheer stupidity means that Ryan now has a secret that threatens to ruin his growing relationship with Jess. A weekend climbing expedition brings them closer together, but a terrifying incident triggers Ryan's confession, which then threatens to break their relationship for ever.

When each has to face the changes in their lives they demonstrate great strength, and are eventually rewarded with a very different adult future to that which they had imagined. Nevertheless the future is one in which they can hope to succeed, as their traumatic teenage experiences have made them stronger people. In many ways these teenagers show themselves to be more responsible than their elders when faced with adversity, and Halahmy's message overall is that through this we gain the strength needed so that we can better endure what may lie ahead of us. Characters from the previous two novels are peripheral to this one, so readers get a glimpse of how their story has progressed. Magic wands do not exist in Halahmy's writing, and her characters have to make tough choices, so we suffer alongside her protagonists as they anticipate their imperfect but realistic future.

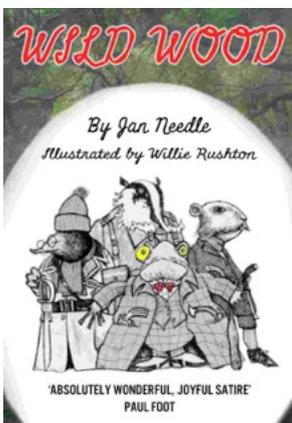
This is a series, not a trilogy. Can we hope for more from Halahmy? I hope so.

Bridget Carrington

Wild Wood

Jan Needle, illus. Willie Rushton, Chelmsford: Golden Duck, pb. 978 1 8992 6221 2, £9.99, 2014, 229pp.

Wild Wood was first published more than 30 years ago, a comic retelling of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. This new edition from Golden Duck (publishers of Julia Jones' excellent *Strong Winds* series, reviewed in *IBBYLink* from 2011 onwards) brings the delights of Jan Needle's razor-sharp left-wing commentary on Grahame's characters – and particularly the proletariats whom Grahame classifies as low-life villains – and Willie Rushton's splendid illustrations to new generations of readers. Our hero is Baxter Ferret, a traction-engine driver, and the familiar story is seen through the eyes of the under-privileged Wild Wooders, whose view of the rich River Bankers (a pun for the early twentieth-first century there) is coloured by their struggle to keep house and home together, help their widowed mothers and feed hungry siblings. These working classes cannot savour the riches of the property and picnics in which Toad indulges, but they gain no less enjoyment from Daisy Ferret's special brew and a good sing-along to an old sea rat's accordion. Baxter's sister Dolly strikes a female emancipatory note totally alien to Grahame's vision of England. In Needle's reading



Toad Hall becomes Brotherhood Hall, and we are presented with additional afterthoughts in the form of recipes for Daisy's beer and also for her toad-in-the-hole!

There is throughout a sense of delight in and respect for the original text, even while, on every page, Needle is repositioning it. Undoubtedly more suited to politically orientated teenagers and their disillusioned parents, this is an excellent satire, to which Rushton's highly distinctive illustrations add immeasurably.

Bridget Carrington

Information Books and Non-Fiction

The Lewis Chessmen and what Happened to Them

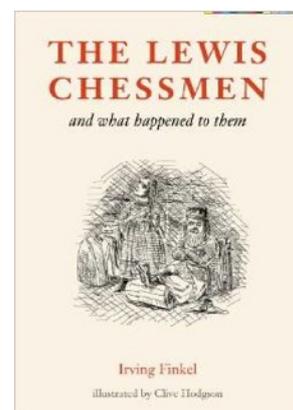
Irving Finkel, illus. Clive Hodgson, London: The British Museum Press, pb. 978 0 7141 2324 0, £4.99, [1995] 2014, 48pp.

The game of chess originated in India over 1500 years ago. It spread to Persia and later was taken up by the Muslim world before arriving in southern Europe in the eleventh century. Since the nineteenth century it has been established as a World Championship event. This slim book reconstructs imaginatively the history of 78 chess pieces carved from walrus ivory, dated around 1150 AD and probably originating from Scandinavia (Norway). They were found by chance in the Spring of 1831 in undergrowth bordering a beach in the bay of Uig, on the north-west coast of the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, by a local man who sold them for a small sum. Thereafter they passed through several hands for increasing sums of money before the British Museum purchased 67 from a dealer in Edinburgh for £84 in November 1831. The Royal Museum of Scotland succeeded in obtaining the 11 remaining pieces in 1888. In 1993, after negotiations with the Royal Museum of Scotland, the pieces were reunited temporarily in a special exhibition of chessmen at the British Museum.

This background is sketched out in an introduction to the book. On the opposite page there is an illustrated map of Great Britain surrounded by choppy waters. Small craft, a lighthouse, seagulls, shoals of fish, a swimmer and a fisherman enliven this representation. Most dramatic is the image of a crowded Viking ship, overshadowed by storm clouds orchestrated by two animated personifications of wind force, heading for the north-east coast of Scotland. The only landmarks identified are the Isle of Lewis, the bay of Uig, Edinburgh and the British Museum, London.

The reader has been introduced to the chess pieces on the end pages, which they seem to occupy resolutely prepared for manoeuvres. Depicted in detail, they are solemn, dignified, watchful characters who look us in the eye and gain our attention. We see them next assembled as a community in the confines of the cavernous space they inhabit for over six centuries before their existence is accidentally stumbled on, and after which they will resume their place in human consciousness and once more capture our imagination.

The narrative structure of the book – three parts and 22 short chapters – gave this reader, who is not a chess player, the sense of a game as the events unfolded. The illustrations complement the text and are interwoven on every page, keeping the reader in the moment and bringing the narrative to life. The illustrative style recalls the work of John Tenniel in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London: Macmillan, 1888) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1897). Readers of these books in the Victorian era would be aware of the existence of the Lewis chessmen and of their residence in the British Museum, as would Lewis Carroll. There is a clear reference to these books in an illustration of 'humble' wooden pieces on a chessboard, with the accompanying text referring to the longing felt by the Lewis chess pieces to be reinstated on such a board. The book concludes fittingly with the pieces reunited for the special exhibition in 1993. Most recently the chessmen were on display as the



finale in the British Museum's magnificent Viking exhibition. On a playful note, Peter Firmin, in a recent newspaper interview, said his animated character Noggin the Nog was inspired by the Lewis chessmen.

Readers of this slim book can first enjoy an extraordinary adventure story. It is suggested age range is 6–11. Thereafter their interests could turn to explorations of Viking history, Norse myths, archaeology and the game of chess, which, for some, becomes a lifelong pleasure.

Judith Philo

What Are You Playing At?

Marie-Sabine Roger, illus. Anne Sol, Slough: Alanna Books, flapped pb. 978 1 9078 2502 6, £12.99, 2013, 18pp.



The cover of this challenging book poses a question that could be understood in different ways, but by placing the emphasis on the words 'are' and 'playing' it alerts us to something that is more than a pleasant enquiry. Printed above the heads of two smiling young children, a boy looking down and a girl looking up at us, we notice that the boy, wearing a blue sweat shirt, is holding a baby doll dressed in pink clothes. The girl in a red floral dress with contrasting pink sleeves is about to launch a light model plane into the air. Opening the book, the end pages are filled with bold, brightly coloured vertical stripes, reminiscent of deckchair canvas. What is the connection with the children? Is it possible that the ideas depicted within the ensuing pages can, like deckchairs, be unfolded or collapsed? The title page that follows shows the children now holding the toys that convention would have them play with.

The book is structured with the left-hand page showing a close up portrait of a girl or boy engrossed in an activity that is conventionally associated with their gender. The opposite page carries a statement or question, written in the topographically mixed style reminiscent of the original title that seems to confirm the stereotype, or does it? Open the flap and the viewer is confounded by a picture of an adult of the opposite sex engaged in the activity that has been detailed as gender specific and it is accompanied by a question or statement that challenges the supposed assumption. All the pictures are photographs. While those of the children appear to be posed, the adult ones are not. They have been gathered from a wide range of regional sources and focus on a variety of contexts: domestic, work, sport and performing arts.

This is a playful book, and a serious one. It is probably most suited to 4–11 year olds. It will gain by being shared. An initial response of amusement could be followed by the chance to think again and engage in discussion. What is fact? What is fiction? The book's lively presentation and format encourages the exploration of ideas. Finding out for oneself through experience increases confidence and opens up the world to possibilities previously restricted by received ideas. With this book that question of childhood 'What do you want to be/do when you grow up?' gains new dimensions.

Judith Philo

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IBBY UK/NCRCL MA Annual Conference

Roehampton College, Roehampton University, London. Saturday 8 November 2014.

'Belonging Is... An Exploration of the Right to Be Included and the Barriers that Must Be Overcome'

The conference will include keynote presentations by writers, publishers and academics, and parallel sessions of workshop presentations on all relevant topics. There will be two bookshops: Newham Bookshop and Letterbox Library. Stalls will include Book Aid and an IBBY UK.

Tickets are available from the [University of Roehampton estore](#).

Full price £80

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– includes morning/afternoon refreshments and a sandwich lunch.

See www.ibby.org.uk and Twitter [@IBBYUK](#) for updates.

The next issue of *IBBYLink* is *IBBYLink* 43, Spring 2015 (copydate 12 December 2014) and will include papers from the IBBYUK/NCRCL MA 'Belonging' conference.

Articles on other subjects are also welcomed. Contributions to Ferelith Hordon: fhordon@aol.com.

If you are interested in becoming a reviewer for *IBBYLink*, contact Sue Mansfield: mansfield37@btinternet.com. New reviewers are always welcome.

Titles for Review

Publishers and others with books to be reviewed in *IBBYLink* should send them to Sue Mansfield at 37 Gartmoor Gardens, London SW19 6NX; mansfield37@btinternet.com.

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Editor: Ferelith Hordon

Associate editor: Jennifer Harding

Reviews editor: Sue Mansfield

To sponsor a future issue of *IBBYLink*, contact Ferelith Hordon, fhordon@aol.com. 8 Terrapin Court, Terrapin Road, London SW17 8QW.

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