

**Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll,
illustrated by Helen Oxenbury (Walker, £14.99)**



A very modern "Alice" for the modern child that dusts off the Victorian fustiness of the book. Some adults will regret this approach and the passing of the dark Tenniel drawings but this is a perfect introduction to the story for younger readers and while Oxenbury's fresh as a daisy illustrations make the story completely accessible they certainly don't Disneyfy it in any way.

**Rumpelstiltskin and Other Grimm Tales by Carol Ann
Duffy, illustrated by Marketa Prachaticka (Faber, £8.99)**

These are familiar stories such as Snow White, Ashputtel and Little Redcap told with a poet's voice. They are bare, spare, and stripped down to the bone so that the story itself stands out like a skeleton. It was Duffy's versions of the tales that were used by the Young Vic for its outstanding Grimm Tales. Reading the stories makes you aware how much the theatrical style sprung from Duffy's gleaming, hard words.

**The Indian in the Cupboard by Lynne Reid Banks
(Collins Modern Classics, £5.99)**

On his ninth birthday, Omri receives many gifts including a much-wanted skateboard. Less desired are the old cupboard given to him by his brother and the three-inch tall plastic Indian given to him by his friend Patrick. But it is the latter two gifts that prove best of all for when the Indian is put in the cupboard and the key is turned he comes to life. Little Bull turns out to be everything you could wish from an Indian - proud, fearless and defiant. But as Omri soon discovers being responsible for another person isn't easy, particularly when they don't always behave as you might expect or wish. This is a wonderful, very readable book in which our responsibilities to each other are explored through an entertaining story.

**The Children of Green Knowe by Lucy Boston (Faber,
£4.99)**

Tolly's great grandmother's house is full of a very special kind of magic. There are other children living there, children who were happy there many centuries before. Boston's novel really does conjure up all the magic of childhood for a new generation in this smart reissue of the 1961 Carnegie winner.

Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats by TS Eliot, illustrated by Edward Gorey (Faber, £9.99)

Essential for reading out loud as a family, TS Eliot's felines are a wonderfully mysterious capricious and amusing group of must-have moggies. Cult American artist Edward Gorey adds more mischief with his illustrations.

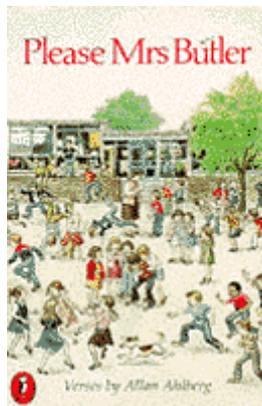
PippiLongstocking by Astrid Lindgren (Puffin, £4.99)

Just when you're feeling down, the homework is piling up and life seems a grind and not fun, you need a dose of PippiLongstocking, the irrepressible little girl who doesn't live by the rules and creates a wonderful fantasy world for herself and her friends. This is a marvellous, stimulating book that is brilliant for children who've had the individuality bashed out of them by school.

The Water Babies by Charles Kingsley (Puffin, £3.99)

Abridged - and all the better for it - version of the classic Victorian tale of chimney sweeps featuring Mrs Do As You Would Be Done By and other morality figures. Of course it is stiff and old-fashioned, but there is also a kind of enchantment about it that survives changes in life and attitudes.

Please Mrs Butler by Allan Ahlberg (Puffin, £3.99)



A child's school day told in verse through from going to school to bedtime. That doesn't make it sound all that interesting, but Ahlberg's easy-to-read poems are funny, sad and absolutely accurate when it comes to emotion. From the title poem about a teacher at the end of her tether, through the pinickety parent complaining about her son's lost possessions to the quietly devastating Small Quarrel, this is a brilliant collection that not only makes children love poetry but gets them writing their own.

The Haunting by Margaret Mahy (Puffin, £4.99)

Carnegie award-winning novel about Barney who one "ordinary Wednesday" finds that "the world tilted and ran downhill in all directions." Barney is being haunted but who is making

the insistent ghostly footsteps in his mind? And why do his sisters' attempts to unravel the mystery lead to a crisis that almost topples the entire family? Mahy's attractively simple storytelling style will attract even the most reluctant readers and creates a convincing portrait of a family tipped out of kilter by the keeping of secrets.

Thunder and Lightnings by Jan Mark (Puffin, £4.99)

Victor was the oddest boy Andrew had ever met. How could he be so dim in school, and yet know so much about aeroplanes? But then, as Andrew starts to slowly appreciate, appearances can be very deceptive indeed and we all have our own strategies for survival. Smartly written, very enjoyable story about friendship and the differences between us all. Particularly good for boys.

The Snow Spider by Jenny Nimmo (Mammoth, £4.99)

Gwyn's granny gives him five strange birthday gifts including a twisted metal brooch. Gwyn gives the brooch to the wind and in return is sent the snow spider who weaves a silken web. Inside the web sits a girl who Gwyn knows but cannot place. Nimmo's book deftly mixes magic and mourning, the ordinary and the other-worldly in this story of a lost sister, a battle of good against evil and the value of knowing the place where you belong.

The House of Rats by Stephen Elboz (OUP, £3.99)

Elboz is one of the best writers around at the moment, crafting his stories with amazing depth and using words with wit and brilliance. This 1992 Smarties Award winner tells of four children who suddenly find their safe life disappearing as the mysterious house where they are living is taken over and wolves howl outside. Only when they meet one of the "Rats" do they find a way to escape.

The Wreck of the Zanzibar by Michael Morpurgo (Mammoth, £4.50)



It is 1907, life on the Scilly Isles is bleak and difficult and it seems likely that Laura and her father will be forced to retreat to the mainland. Even the cow stops milking. Morpurgo's book

is written with his customary quiet authority as it charts the battle between man and nature and the cruelties and beauties of the sea and its creatures.

A Dog So Small by Phillipa Pearce (Puffin, £4.99)

The longing, the sadness, the sense of otherness and the exhilaration of childhood are brought vividly to life in this story of Ben, a boy who so much wants a dog he conjures one up out of his imagination.

The Mouse and His Child by Russell Hoban (Faber, £4.99)

Russell Hoban's book is a brilliant modern fairytale about a father and son toy mouse who dance under a Christmas tree until they break the ancient clockwork rules and are themselves broken. Discarded, they are rescued from a dustbin and repaired by a tramp before setting out on a dangerous quest to find a home of their own. A crackling read, full of Hoban's sly humour and his belief in the importance of having a place of your own and being happy.

The Finders by Nigel Hinton (Puffin, £3.99)

Walking across the park one morning, Rosie encounters a frail old man who asks her to post a package for him. Little does our heroine know that it contains the Djinn star whose evil magic threatens to take her over. Only the Finders can help her. Hinton's book, a pacy, well-plotted novel is a really good introduction to more adult reading for nine year olds and above.

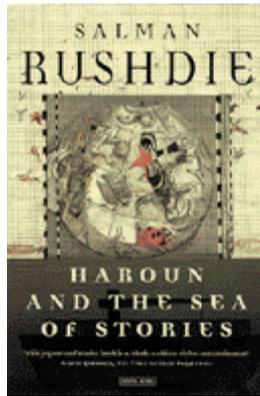
The Illustrated Mum by Jacqueline Wilson (Corgi, £3.99)

Wilson's best book to date is a no-holds bar account of the mental breakdown of Marigold, mother to Star and Dolphin and covered from head to toe in tattoos. For years the girls have persuaded themselves that life with mum is a gas (except when she goes weird) but now they are growing up and looking at the world and mum with new eyes. This is a wonderful, perceptive and disturbing book about mental illness, irresponsible parenthood and the falling out of love of children with their parents. Wilson holds true to the very end, offering no happy-ever-afters but plenty of possibilities instead.

King of the Shadows by Susan Cooper (Puffin, £4.99)

Shakespeare's London is brought vividly to life in cleverly written novel that sees young actor Nat Field slipping back 400 years in time to find himself playing Puck at the Globe Theatre in 1599. Playing opposite him is the King of the Shadows himself, William Shakespeare. Worth a hundred history lessons, Cooper's novel combines thriller-like suspense with a story of theatrical and personal transformations.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories by Salman Rushdie (Granta, £6.99)



Think the Arabian Nights. Think Alice in Wonderland. Think Star Wars. You can think a lot about Rushdie's story about a boy's quest to restore the gift of storytelling to his father, but you'll probably be too busy enjoying it. This is a dense, fantastical book, in which the comic rubs shoulders with evil and the savage with the lyrical. Lovely.

The Wizard of Earthsea by Ursula Le Guin (Puffin, £4.99)

The first book in Le Guin's deep, dense and utterly brilliant Earthsea series, a fantasy sequence that is to Terry Pratchett what double cream is to skim milk. Le Guin writes with a calm authority, almost a stillness, as she charts the story of the young wizard Sparrowhawk who misuses magic and unleashes an evil shadow-beast who threatens his land. Only Sparrowhawk can destroy it, but the journey is long and difficult and takes him to the farthest corner of Earthsea.

The Rinaldi Ring by Jenny Nimmo (Mammoth £4.99)

Eliot is finding it hard to come to terms with his mother's death. But then he finds a ghost in his bedroom who has her own grief to deal with. Nimmo's beautifully written and understated novel is about the way the past makes its imprint upon the present and the subtle interconnections of both history and family relationships.

A Voyage of Discovery 1: From the Land of the Amazons to the Indigo Isles by Francois Place (Pavillion, £12.99)

Francois Place is an artist, an author, a dreamer and the inventor of strange, fantastical countries and legends that he realises through fly-away prose and exquisite pen pictures. It is like being taken on an amazing off-beat adventure by a 19th century explorer. This is a must-have book for the dreamer in every child, a book to awaken curiosity and the imagination.

The Ghost Drum by Susan Price (Faber £3.50)

Imagine a country where night lasted an entire winter and where in the darkness danger stalks. Price conjures a world of magic and danger to tell this modern, mythic fairytale about a boy imprisoned in a tower whose cries for help are heard by the witch-girl, Chingis. If they like this try the equally enthralling Ghost Dance and Ghost Song.

Walkabout by James Vance Marshall (Puffin, £3.99)



A culture clash of epic proportions ensues in this classic novel that sees two privileged English kids abandoned in the Australian outback and forced to fend for themselves.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl (Puffin Modern Classic, £5.99)

Truly scrumptious tale of a boy called Charlie Bucket who wins a golden ticket, entitling him to a day out at Willy Wonka's miraculous chocolate factory. The real question about this book is how long you'll be able to hold off before reading it to your kids. Dahl's wonderfully evil sense of humour makes what could simply be a modern version of the cautionary tale into something exceptional. The writing sizzles, foams, spits and bubbles over. Wild and wonderful. Read it to them from six; read it alone from eight. Follow with Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator, James and the Giant Peach and the BFG (all Puffin £5.99)

The Earth Giant by Melvin Burgess (Puffin, £3.99)

As a great storm rages around their house, Amy and Peter hear a terrible noise like a dying giant. Amy knows that the sound is an ancient oak tree half a mile away being ripped from the ground. Trapped among its roots is a secret that only she can uncover. Beautifully wrought story about the way secrets bring you together and tear you apart, and about the competitive relationship between a brother and sister from a fine writer best known for his brilliant books for teenagers.

Woof! By Allan Ahlberg (Puffin, £4.99)

Highly entertaining book about Eric, a perfectly ordinary boy, who feels his nose becoming cold and wet and his ears becoming floppy as he is transformed into a dog. In its own schoolboyish way Eric's transformation is just as interesting and surreal as that of poor Gregor Samsa into a beetle.

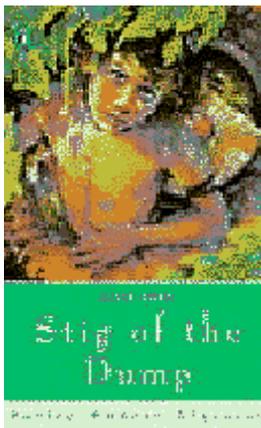
Matilda by Roald Dahl (Puffin, £4.99)

The Roald Dahl must-read for this age-group; they'll find it impossible to resist even if they are hooked on the Danny Devito film version. In fact, seeing the film leads naturally into wanting to read the story of the remarkable Matilda, ignored and derided by her parents and bullied by the odious teacher Miss Trunchbull, who not only has a brilliant mind but strange kinetic powers. A brilliant, empowering book that shows children that they don't have to be helpless even in the face of the most bullying of adults.

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett (Puffin, £2.99)

Wonderful story about the disagreeable Mary Lennox who, after her parents die, is brought back from India to live in her uncle's great lonely house on the moors. Hodgson Burnett captures the fury of being a helpless, lonely child that makes both Mary and the invalid Colin behave badly. But neither it nor Hodgson Burnett's other classic *A Little Princess* (Puffin, £2.99) are particularly easy reads. Eight-year-olds are likely to get frustrated by the sentence construction. Either read it to them or wait a couple of years.

Stig of the Dump by Clive King (Puffin, £5.99)



Modern environmentally and health-conscious youngsters might eye the fox hunting and smoking with horror. But this story of Barney, a small boy who makes friends with a strange, Stone Age type boy he finds living in the local quarry, is enormously appealing. A really rollicking straightforward read that celebrates a strange friendship and the way two are better than one when it comes to taking on the bullies. Stig's puzzlement at the modern way of life makes the reader look at the world from a slightly different perspective.

Ballet Shoes by Noel Streatfield (Puffin Modern Classics, £5.99)

Adopted as babies by Great Uncle Matthew, Pauline, Petrova and Posy lead a sheltered life until Great Uncle's disappearance leads to money troubles. The girls are enrolled in stage school so they will be able to earn a living. It all seems slightly quaint now, but Streatfield's characterisations are wonderfully vivid, the writing straightforward and honest and the narrative a page-turner. Quite delightful and infinitely more real than all those titles currently being churned out for ballet-mad little girls.

Mary Poppins by PL Travers (Collins, £5.99)

No spoonfuls of sugar are necessary to help this classic tale slip down. Jane and Michael's new nanny turns out to be the intimidating Mary Poppins, who brings a little magic into the lives of children in the Edwardian middle classes' equivalent of "care"

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone by JK Rowling (Bloomsbury, £4.99)

Yes, the Harry Potter books are derivative and hierarchical, but Rowling's a genuinely witty writer with a terrific gift for naming things: one of the great pleasures of these books is the way they present the wizarding world as a parallel universe to that of us poor muggles. What's more, they are real page-turners and appeal to boys and girls equally. The second in the series, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, is the weakest; the third, The Prisoner of Azkaban the best, not least because the Dementors are so truly terrifying. But these kinds of arguments are academic: I've yet to meet a child who is resistant and plenty of adults find them just as spellbinding. Eight upward, but younger brothers and sisters are liable to get in on the act earlier, particularly if you read it to them. There is also a really good unabridged audiocassette version of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (Cover to Cover, £19.99) read by Stephen Fry. It runs to 8hours and 23minutes, which sure beats nine hours of I Spy.

Lizzie Dripping by Helen Cresswell (Puffin, £3.99)

Written in 1973, Cresswell's stories about life in a small Welsh village where Lizzie wanders the streets with her head in the clouds seem almost to come from another century. But while village life has changed out of all recognition, the emotions of Lizzie, who wants something exciting to happen in her life, who loves her soft dad and rather severe mum but keeps getting into scrapes and who meets a witch in the way other people run into the milkman, remain as fresh as a daisy.

The Little White Horse by Elizabeth Goodge (OUP, £4.99)

A touch of romance and a shiver of fear are to be found in this 1946 Carnegie Medal-winning fantasy, set in the beautiful valley of Moonacre where the moon princess once ruled. Old-fashioned, but there is toughness beneath the whimsy. More for the girls than the boys.

The Borrowers by Mary Norton (Puffin Modern Classics, £5.99)

A classic that doesn't reduce the world - on the contrary, it opens it up - but which does view it from a child-sized perspective. It tells the story of a family of little people who live beneath the floorboards and borrow from "human beans" who don't even know they exist - until the young Arietty makes friends with "the boy upstairs". There is nothing in the slightest bit twee about it. Norton writes brilliantly, viewing the world as if through the eyes of her little people with a sense of wonder and terror. Even children who are addicts of the excellent but

bastardised film version and the superb BBC serial version will gobble this up on the printed page.

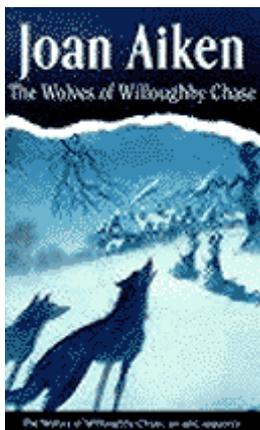
Stonestruck by Helen Cresswell (Puffin £4.99)

Jessica loses her house in the blitz and is evacuated before the rest of her school to a huge Welsh castle with only the gardener and housekeeper for company. But she is not alone; the castle grounds are full of other mysterious presences including a ghostly boy, a sinister green lady, a screeching peacock and chains of desperate "stonestruck" children, engaged in a deadly game of tag with Jessica as the quarry. Cresswell writes with a spare, dense poetry about the desolation of separation, the isolating effect of unhappiness and the need to take care about what you wish. A really spellbinding piece of grown-up writing for children that makes the Goosebumps series pale into insignificance. Children who enjoy this will also devour Cresswell's *Moondial* (Puffin, £4.99). It can be read alone at 10 upward, but both are very satisfying for adults to read to the 8-upward age range. In a different vein, but just as good, is Cresswell's *Snatchers* - the story of a girl whose guardian angel appears in the local park to protect her from the Land of the Starless Night. Liable to engender plenty of hilarious discussion about whether angels have belly buttons.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (Collins, £3.99)

Yes, yes, we know. Ridiculously middle-class and old-fashioned and full of Christian imagery, the triumph of good over evil and being a jolly good sort. But really it is magic, provided you take care not to force it down your children's throats too early. Some of the sentence structure is quite difficult and you really need to be eight upward and a confident reader not to be put off. But it's like getting into the wardrobe in the first place: a bit tricky, but once you've made it through the door, utterly transforming. Of course this isn't actually the first in the series - *The Magician's Nephew* is - but this is where you should begin.

The Wolves of Willoughby Chase by Joan Aiken (Red Fox, £3.99)



Joan Aiken's classic adventure story is set during the imaginary reign of James III in the early part of the 19th century when the recently completed channel tunnel has allowed wolves to overrun large parts of Britain. A really rollicking story, with plenty of wild flights of the

imagination, it has the essential ingredients of lost parents, an evil governess and two feisty cousins, Bonnie and Sylvia, determined to evade the clutches of the evil Miss Slighcarp. The good news for those with keen readers is that there are more than a dozen books in the Willoughby Chase sequence. The bad news is that although featuring the memorably stropy heroine Dido Twite, some of the subsequent novels are off-puttingly obscure.

The Boggart by Susan Cooper (Puffin, £4.99)

Funny and tender storytelling from the excellent Susan Cooper. This one is about a boggart that is accidentally transported from his remote Scottish island to the bright lights of Toronto, and doesn't like it one bit. Bad-tempered things, boggarts.

The Peppermint Pig by Nina Bawden (Puffin, £4.99)

Life seemed grim when father lost his job and the family had to move to their aunt's home. But with the arrival of Johnnie the pig, things begin to improve. Really enjoyable story from a fine writer whose other books include the excellent *Carrie's War* (Puffin, £4.99), about wartime evacuees, and *Granny the Pag* (Puffin, £4.99), an enjoyable read about an unconventional Gran and her strong-minded granddaughter.

Five Children and It by E Nesbit (Puffin, £3.99)

Childhood is somehow golden in E Nesbit's stories about a family of children who discover a Psammead or sand fairy, a grumpy and very ancient creature that can give them wishes. The difficulty is of thinking of really good wishes and not getting things that they really don't want at all, and even the simplest of wishes seem to get them into great difficulties. This book is such fun that children want to gobble it down in one sitting and are absolutely amazed when you tell them it was written almost a century ago. It seems so fresh because it gets to the very heart of being a child - the wonderful sense that anything can happen to you and probably will. The adventures continue with *The Story of the Amulet* and *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (both Puffin, £3.99).

Double Act by Jacqueline Wilson (Corgi Yearling, £3.99)

To the average nine-year-old girl, Jacqueline Wilson's books are as desirable as a trip to Claire's Accessories and a pair of the latest fringed jeans. This story of ten-year-old identical twins Ruby and Garnet, who lose their mother and have to come to terms not only with their dad's new love but also with growing up and growing apart, is a model of Wilson's exuberant and confessional storytelling style, in which Ruby and Garnet take it in turns to tell the story. Wilson's books can be too obviously issue-driven to be really satisfying, but they are a stepping-stone into a real world where real kids face tough emotional problems. Plenty to choose from: we'd also recommend *The Bed and Breakfast Star*, *The Story of Tracy Beaker* and *The Lottie Project* (all Corgi Yearling, £3.99).

Watership Down by Richard Adams (Puffin, £5.99)

Join Hazel and his brave band of rabbits as they set out in search of a new home. Richard Adams's modern classic is not fluffy or cute at all. In fact, it's so good that you completely forget after a while that we're talking rabbits, not humans.

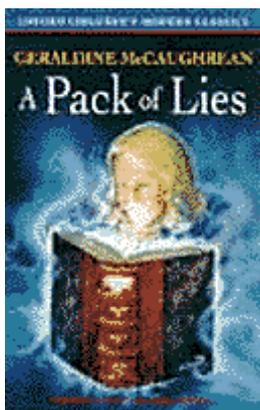
The Runaways by Ruth Thomas (Red Fox, £3.99)

It is two children against the rest of the world in Thomas's riveting tale about Julia and Nathan, who win popularity at school when they find a stash of money in a deserted house, but soon decide to flee when teachers and parents want to know where it came from. Thomas writes from a child's point of view about what it feels like not to have a special friend and never to be picked when teams are being sorted. The unlikely friendship between Julia and Nathan is drawn with a delicacy that never ignores its difficulties and the final triumphant realisation that love is worth having is exhilarating.

Clockwork by Philip Pullman (Corgi Yearling, £3.99)

Macabre is the only word for Pullman's wonderfully creepy tale that, needless to say, runs like clockwork. In a way it is a parable about the power of storytelling itself. But it is also part fairytale, part ghost story and part science fiction; Pullman writes with a deceptive simplicity that makes the whole thing feel both ancient and very modern at the same time. There are some wonderfully witty picture asides, but is the narrative that really winds you up: a creepy tale in which a lazy apprentice clockmaker gets his comeuppance and a story being told on a dark winter's night suddenly takes on a sinister life of its own. If families still did that kind of thing, this would be the perfect novel to be read out loud around the fire. While roasting chestnuts, of course. Short enough to tempt even reluctant readers in the 9 upward age range, although those of a nervous disposition should probably wait a year or so or try Pullman's superb feminist adventure story, *The Firework-Maker's Daughter* (Corgi Yearling, £3.99).

A Pack of Lies by Geraldine McCaughton (OUP, £3.99)



Cleverly structured and wittily told series of stories that combine to make one satisfying whole as they tell of Ailsa, who sees the truth behind the yarns spun by the mysterious man who helps out in her mum's antique shop.

Tom's Midnight Garden by Philippa Pearce (Puffin, £4.99)

I still can't pass a grandfather clock without thinking of this book, so strong an impression did this haunting story make on me as a child. Pearce's writing sends a shiver of both excitement and fear up the spine in this clever double time-framed story about Tom who, when the clock strikes 13, can see his aunt's house just as it was 50 years ago. Slightly younger readers will enjoy Pearce's *A Dog So Small* (Puffin £4.99), about a boy who so longs for a dog that he conjures one up from his imagination.

What Katy Did by Susan Coolidge (Puffin, £3.99)

North American classic about the irrepressible Katy who courts disaster and only starts to really grow up after she is paralysed in a fall from a swing.

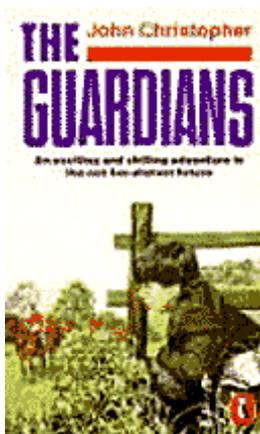
The Silver Sword by Ian Serraillier (Puffin, £5.99)

Based on a true story, Serraillier's book doesn't flinch in recounting the adventures of four children as they struggle to stay alive in Nazi-occupied Europe and their desperate, epic journey from Poland to Switzerland in search of their parents.

Skellig by David Almond (Hodder, £4.99)

"A story of love and faith, written with exquisite, heart-fluttering tenderness. It is an extraordinarily profound book, no matter what the age of the reader," was the verdict of the Whitbread judges who gave this the Children's Book of the Year Award. You can't disagree. An instant modern classic.

The Guardians by John Christopher (Puffin, £4.99)



Engrossing Guardian Award-winner from the early 1970s and set in the near future, which is nearer now than it was then. It is an atmospheric tale about Rob, on the run after the mysterious death of his dad, who crosses The Barrier and finds himself in a countryside that initially seems idyllic. So why is rebellion in the air?

The Tulip Touch by Ann Fine (Puffin £4.99)

Friendship proves dangerous in Fine's uncomfortable and genuinely powerful novel that carries with it echoes of the Jamie Bulger case. Natalie is attracted to the difficult, disturbed Tulip, perhaps because she seems so dangerous. But soon she is out of her depth as Tulip's games get increasingly out of control. Plenty of control, though, in Fine's delicate exploration of friendship, betrayal and guilt.

Wolf by Gillian Cross (OUP, £5.99)

At night Cassie dreams of wolves. They are coming to get her. But how can she be kept safe? When Cassie is sent without warning from her nan's to live with her feckless, beautiful mother she becomes easy prey until she finds a way of protecting herself. A really haunting novel from Gillian Cross, whose books *The Demon Headmaster* (Puffin, £4.99) and *The Great Elephant Chase* (Puffin, £4.99) will give equal pleasure.

Two Weeks With the Queen by Morris Gleitzmann (Puffin, £3.99)

How many books for children deal with dying? How many deal with Aids? Morris Gleitzmann's does, and this hard-hitting Australian writer handles the subject with a surprising off-the-wall humour which ensures the book is moving and not at all mawkish. Colin refuses to believe that his younger brother is dying of cancer and decides to take things into his own hands. Then he meets a young man whose partner is dying of Aids, who helps him come to terms with living and losing.

Goggle-Eyes by Anne Fine (Puffin, £4.99)

Kitty Killin is not only a good storyteller but also the World's Greatest Expert when it comes to mums having new and unwanted boyfriends, particularly when there is a danger they may turn into new and unwanted stepfathers. Oddly touching story about Goggle-Eyes, the most unwanted boyfriend of them all, written in a knock-kneed prose that is funny and affecting.

Smith by Leon Garfield (Puffin Modern Classics, £5.99)

Garfield's magnificent book was written in the 1960s, but has a Dickensian richness as it follows the adventures of Smith, a 12-year-old pickpocket living in the slums around St Paul's, who witnesses a murder and escapes with a document belonging to the victim. Hounded through London, befriended and betrayed, Smith eventually discovers that he has something of real value. Not an easy read if you are under eleven, but an enormously satisfying one. The vividness of Garfield's writing puts the blandness of many modern writers' prose in the shade.