



Cowboys; Pirates

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BfK Rating:

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The 'Fact or Fiction' series grabs your attention by concentrating on historical subjects that have already proved their fascination in popular literature and films. It has nothing to do with the National Curriculum and is published in the belief that children can be excited by history enough to want to read it for themselves, even if their interest is first stirred by violence and sensationalism. Just for that, I like it.

Ross is an experienced author who can carry two levels of discussion and convince his readers that, once the false glamour is stripped away, fact is more exciting than fiction. His way into **Pirates** is easier than **Cowboys** because he wisely organises the book around the different areas of pirate activity and introduces us to a multiracial crew of brigands and cut-throats, each with their own heyday, sea going craft and modus operandi.

Cowboys requires a little more historical sophistication but Ross is undaunted and brings the subject bang up-to-date with mention of J.R. in 'Dallas' and Ronald Reagan as modern expressions of the cowboy myth.

The series is intended to have an easy appeal and no subject is lingered on long enough to threaten boredom, but it treats its readers seriously, and it will be popular, particularly with lower secondary age children, who can be expected to recognise Long John Silver and Clint Eastwood. However, it is badly let down by its illustrations (credited only to McRae Books, Italy) which have neither the accuracy nor visual excitement that the books demand. They look particularly foolish beside colour stills from feature films.

Running Order:

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