



Editorial 203

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Editorial

?Christmas is coming?? - the words conjure up images of abundance; parcels piled round the tree, over-decorated tables, and pudding or cake stuffed with raisins, currants and cherries. Here is the **BfK** pudding and we hope that readers, like little Jack Horner, will be able to ?stick in a thumb/and pull out a plum?.

As always books and reading are the focus, especially the possibility of the sharing of books which is at the heart of my choice of books for Christmas. A number of contributors share their highlights of the year, looking back to bring to the forefront the titles that have really shone for them.

Authors and illustrators are the creators behind such inspiration. Michael Morpurgo whose birthday we celebrate, has been grabbing the attention of young readers for four decades. With titles that range in appeal across all ages - from **Wombat goes walkabout**, **Conker**, **When the Whales came** to **Private Peaceful** and **Kensuke's Kingdom** - here is an author who is truly generous in his storytelling. This is not a simple reference to the volume of his work, but also to the subjects he has chosen to highlight; subjects that might be considered difficult - collaboration, war, intolerance. Stories and storytelling are an important, even vital, medium through which contentious and disturbing topics can be raised and then shared. Nor is he alone. Anthony McGowan is a current author who is not afraid to explore the dark side using humour as a foil. In remembering Robert Leeson whose recent death is a sad loss to the world of children's books, we remember an author who was one of the first to shake up the cosy post war world of children's literature. Tackling subjects seen as ?difficult? or taboo, such as racism, teenage relationships, pregnancy, and by challenging adults through his reflections on writing for children, he raised issues and concerns that are still relevant and still need to be shared.

Indeed, there is a responsibility to think how stories are presented and the messages they may contain. While at a certain level reading is a personal activity and stories banquets that allow each reader to take what he or she needs, at another, stories, and the vehicle through which they are transmitted, books, can reflect attitudes that are more limiting. Anna McQuinn raises just such a concern in considering how books can be marketed in a way that both limits and confirms ideas about gender.

Questioning, sharing those questions - books allow this to happen. They can be cosy, or challenging. The questions raised by war are both of the present and can be seen reflected in the past. As we look forward to the centenary of the First World War, Margaret Mallett's selection of titles will provide food for thought and the imagination.

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