



# Awards: The Guardian Children's Fiction Award & The Mother Goose Award - 1994

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Judges **Rachel Anderson** and **Michael Foreman** talk about this year's winners.

## The Guardian Children's Fiction Award & The Mother Goose Award

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The **Guardian Children's Fiction Award** is won by **THE MENNYMS**

**Rachel Anderson**, one of the judges, reports

The best reward for having been a previous winner was to be asked onto this year's judging team. What joy! But eek, what responsibility in case we got it wrong.

We had three months' reading time, then met round the **Guardian's** boardroom table with clean copies of the contending titles, waiting like nervous guests, down one end. The other judges were writers Roger McGough, Geraldine McCaughrean and Chris Powling, with **Guardian** Children's Books Editor, Joanna Carey.

Each title on our long-list was given a thorough airing before we dared draw up a short-list. How durable was its appeal? Would it stand up to re-reading, maybe many times over. How well did it read aloud?

Robert Leeson's **Smart Girls** (Walker, 0 7445 24415, £6.99) is the nicest volume to hold and feel - slim format, crisp jacket, decent paper, clear typeface, containing five witty folk tales from around the world, linked by the theme of girls as champions. The most striking cover, on front and back of Lesley Howarth's **The Flower King** (Walker, 0 7445 24512, £4.99 pbk), is a glowing Van Gogh-style landscape out of which the hero broods moodily, as well he might with all the Cornish goings-on he has to uncover.

**The Mennymys** (Julia MacRae, 185681 208 1, £9.99) by Sylvia Waugh offers the most unusual subject-matter, an everyday story of knitted folk. Almost a juvenile **Diary of Mr Pooter**, it chronicles a year in the Mennymys' gentle suburban lives, crossing back and forth over the borders of reality and pretend.

The most startling opening line is in Pat Moon's **The Spying Game** (Orchard, 185213 624 3, £4.99 pbk), a breathless detective novel about bullying in which the narrator-sleuth is, unwittingly, the most menacing of all bullies. Yes please, Pat Moon, more. **The Baby and Fly Pie** (Andersen, 0 86263 4615, £8.99) by Melvin Burgess is funny, fast and chirpy, despite its ultra-serious subject - rubbish-tip urchins eking out a dangerously varied existence in some future apocalyptic London. It's uncompromisingly harsh and caused one of the judges to suggest it should come with a literary health

warning: 'Not to be approached by sensitive readers'. **The Frozen Waterfall** (Faber, 0 571 16794 2, £10.99) by Gaye Hicyilmaz is another dark tale of modern times, rural Turks meeting the richest country in Europe. A long and thoughtful book, attending carefully to the delight and shock experienced by a spirited heroine who settles in Switzerland.

Once you've won the Guardian Children's Fiction Award, you're never allowed to win again. Is this supposed to make it fairer for the others? How can selecting a single winner from such diversity of talent and theme ever be fair? So, I proposed to Richard Gott, **Guardian** literary editor and our referee, that we make not one Award but six, with correspondingly smaller amounts of glory and cash (i.e.  $\pounds 1000 \div 6 = \pounds 166.66$  each).

But he said, 'Sorry, no go.' So this year's Award goes to **The Mennymys**. The other five are pretty good, too. Don't take our word for it. Try them all. Decide for yourself.

[Ed's note: Red Fox publish a paperback version of **The Mennymys** in July.]

## **A Gander at Mother Goose**

by **Michael Foreman** who was on the judging panel

This was my first time as a judge of The Mother Goose Award, given annually to the best newcomer to British children's book illustration. The best bit was receiving a daily jiffy-bag of books. Each evening the family enjoyed them to varying degrees and I couldn't decide on an outright winner.

When I walked through Embankment Gardens on my way to the judging, I had three books on my shortlist. I would be happy for any of the three to emerge in First Place.

All the books entered were spread on the table. Chairperson, Colin Hawkins, held up each in turn and a book which received no vote went on the floor. After three rounds five books remained on the table. My shortlist of three were still there.

By now my choice had narrowed to two. It happened we were unanimous about the leading two but split on which should be first. The leaders were so different and difficult to compare. We also had to remove one more book from the table as only three runners-up were allowed.

There was a long discussion. No blows were exchanged and no sandwiches thrown. The hardest decision was which book should join the others on the floor.

In the end, First Place by a clear majority was **Where the Great Bear Watches**, illustrated by Lisa Flather, published by ABC (text James Sage, 185406 177 1, £6.95). The pictures are stunning wood or lino cuts and have the bold shapes you'd expect from such a process. But they also have delicate and subtle detail and a feeling for facial expression that suggest a real ability to draw and the promise of a rich variety of work to come. We await her next book with great anticipation. After the final voting, we discovered Lisa Flather is a graduate of the excellent Natural History Illustration course at the Royal College of Art.

The other three winners were:

**Think of an Eel** illustrated by Mike Bostock (text Karen Wallace, Walker, 07445 2250 1, £6.99). Elegantly designed and beautifully painted watercolours give a glowing treatment to a fine factual text helped by the usual high production values of Walker Books. Probably the most complete book of all the entries.

**Cat Song** illustrated by Alan Curless (text Andrew Matthews, Hutchinson, 0 09 1762219, £8.99) has masses of cats hurly-burling over the pages with a great variety of movement and expression. Very difficult to do and very well done here.

**Three Bags Full** illustrated by Sally Hobson (text by Ragnhild Scamell, ABC, 185406 178 X, £6.95) is exuberant and boldly painted in strong colours across double-page spreads which contain wit and feeling.

All the judges were happy with the variety of approach shown in the prize-winning quartet. To have selected four rather similar books would have given a poor signal to new illustrators. Once again, we hope not just to have selected the books with the most successful illustrations, but also the artists who appeared to have real potential to produce more books and continue to get better and better. Sometimes the first book is as good as the artist gets.

We look forward to future books from the four winners to support our confidence in their talent, and books from the other entrants to show we got it wrong.

Michael Foreman's fellow judges were Colin Hawkins, Wendy Cooling, Charlotte Voake, Nicola Bayley, and Sally Grindley of the book club, Books For Children, who sponsor the Mother Goose Award.

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