

# The 4 corners

*Newsletter of the Teaching Resources Collection at Bishop Grosseteste University Library*

**Welcome** to the successor of *Hullabaloo!*, which was a free children's literature newsletter published by Library Services at Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU) to promote its children's literature collection in the TRC. The newsletter ran between 2005 and 2019, and was edited by BGU librarians, Emma Sansby and Janice Morris. Its high standard will be a tough act to follow. Going forward, the future issues of this newsletter will be published bi-annually and edited by Rose Roberto, the new Teaching Resources Librarian, and Amy Webster, the new Senior Lecturer in Education Studies. Both of them joined BGU as permanent staff in Summer 2020. Three regular features will be 'New titles in the TRC' 'Books that moved us' and 'How children's literature changed my life.' Annually, we will feature award winning books, profiles about authors and illustrators, as well as topical subjects such as innovative book design, information literacy, and informal ways to engage children with graphical arts and literature.

To say that many things have happened between 2019 and 2020, would be quite the under-statement. We are living in an unprecedented time with a massive pandemic that constrains our movements and has touched many of us personally. At times like these, one of the most comforting activities we can undertake is reading. While some of the most treasured children's classics enable a world of joyful escape, non-fiction reading is fundamental to keeping us informed and enabling better decision making. Non-fiction books can also provide a way to escape, and an alternative source of comfort by providing readers with sense of purpose.

Many non-fiction books do not just enumerate facts, they can also be a call to action or a source of inspiration. This issue highlights non-fiction titles, and recognises November as non-fiction reading month. Three non-fiction books that were added to the TRC stock this summer that particularly speak to the important issues of our time. They are: *Greta Thunberg*, *The Undefeated*, and *The Right World: Roget and His Thesaurus*. Please see the next page for more information about these particular titles.



Although the library temporarily has shorter opening services, a display at the library counter also highlighted other non-fiction books aimed at different ages related to Remembrance Sunday.

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## Regular feature: New titles in the Teaching Resources Collection (TRC)



## Uplifting non-fiction titles that face today's pressing events head-on

BY ROSE ROBERTO,  
TEACHING RESOURCES LIBRARIAN

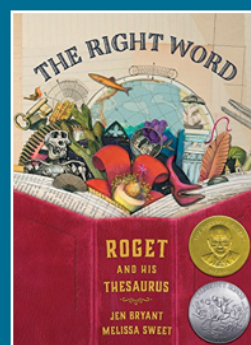
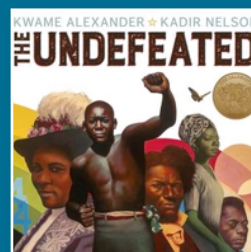


Three non-fiction books that were added to the TRC stock this summer particularly speak to the important issues of our time. They are: *Greta Thunberg* (Frances Lincoln Children's Books £7.99), *The Undeclared* (Versify, £7.99), and *The Right World: Roget and His Thesaurus* (Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, £9.80). All three of them are historical biographies and all three of them represent the themes of advocacy, as well as the ability to use personal initiative and creativity, combined with fact-based data to speak larger truths.

Like all books in the Little People, Big Dreams series, *Greta Thunberg* has lovely illustrations and poignant text packed between two dark blue covers. This book focuses on the Swedish environmental-activist teen who started a movement promoting the message that humanity is facing an existential crisis from climate change. *Greta Thunberg* is written by Maria Isabell Sanchez Vegara and illustrated by Anke Weckmann.

*The Undeclared*, is an artistic and poetic tribute to the resiliency, strength, and perseverance of the historical and present-day Black Americans who have influenced the world by overcoming personal and systemic barriers. Awarded the 2020 Caldecott Medal, Kadir Nelson's illustrations amplify Kwame Alexander's moving poem.

*The Right World: Roget and His Thesaurus* is a book about the life of Peter Mark Roget, whose love for words turned into organising ideas. His collection of lists grew and grew, eventually turning into one of the most important reference books of all time—*Roget's Thesaurus*. Told with lyrical text and creative illustrations, this book shows that words not only matter, words have power. Written by Jen Bryant and illustrated by Melissa Sweet, this amazing book received both the Orbis Pictus Honor for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children and won two medals: The Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award and the Randolph Caldecott Medal.



We hope that you check out one or all of these books, all of which are now available in the TRC.



Regular feature: How children's literature changed my life...

## Onions, Ogres and Jolly Postmen: Becoming a Children's Literature Scholar



'This book is like an onion...'

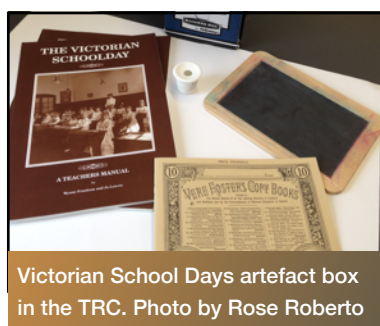
These were words I never thought I would be saying, and certainly not to a professor at the University of Cambridge in an interview about the *The Jolly Postman*.

Peeling back the layers (the last onion related comment I promise) my interaction with, and love of, children's literature started at a young age. My mum was (and still is) an avid reader and some of my earliest memories are of sharing books together - from bed time stories to car journeys and from Fairy Tales to the now widely satirised Biff, Chip and Kipper stories brought home from school. These shared story times transitioned into more solitary but still enjoyable experiences like reading a book by torchlight after bedtime. I developed my own favourite authors and genres, devouring Enid Blyton's school series, racing through a range of 'children's classics' and dabbling in popular fiction like the Goosebumps series (only briefly), the delightful yet often disgusting work of Roald Dahl and later Meg Cabot's Princess Diaries series (a full arc back to fairy tales perhaps). For a period of time in childhood my nickname was even 'Matilda' as I bore an uncanny resemblance to actress in the film version that was compounded by my fringe, hair ribbons and cart of books (though I sadly lacked magical powers).

I read through primary school and secondary school and into university where I was studying Education. My reading tastes had moved further away from children's literature but I was reunited with it at Durham. I was fortunate to have a tutor, Professor David Waugh, who not only adored children's literature but whose work involved researching it. Reading both his work and the range of other children's literature scholarship it led me to was a revelation – that you could (and many people did!) study these fascinating books. The field blurred the boundaries of work and pleasure infinitely by presenting a subject matter that was engaging, exciting and filled me with enthusiasm. Incidentally this was happening elsewhere in the university which was renowned for offering a module on Harry Potter that started with a 'sorting ceremony' in the great hall of Durham Castle. My newfound discovery of the field of children's literature led me to do my undergraduate dissertation project on children's attitudes towards, and ability to engage with, classic texts. As I became more interested in the field (and not yet quite ready to enter the real world) I found out about the existence of Masters programmes in children's literature where this field was not just reduced to a module or part of a course but was one in its own right. Even the daunting prospect of writing an application essay for the programme at Cambridge was an enjoyable experience of discussing intertextuality in Janet and Allan Ahlberg's famous picture book *The Jolly Postman*. This involved exploring the different dimensions (or layers) that children's books can have and inspired by my own intertextual experiences I was reminded of the scene in *Shrek* where Shrek explains to Donkey that ogres are like onions - 'not because they smell but because they have layers!' And so I arrived at the point that I was discussing onions, ogres and Jolly Postmen in an office at Cambridge with a Professor who was famous for her work on picture books.

Thankfully she wasn't deterred by the slightly odd comparison and let me in to spend a magical year researching picture books, Paddington and Mary Poppins - and then four more when I wasn't quite ready to leave the world of children's literature but that's a tale for another day – or edition.

So you *can* research children's literature (see page 9 on the new MA in Children's Literature and Literacies, no onions required), you *should* research children's literature. You *will* love it!



Victorian School Days artefact box in the TRC. Photo by Rose Roberto

## *The House by the Lake, (2020)*

BY MARY-LOUISE MAYNES, SENIOR  
LECTURER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES

This non-fiction picture book represents for me the very best of ‘new’ children’s non-fiction: it speaks to the imagination and the emotions as well as drawing upon verifiable and dependable sources. It is the biography of a house, told by the great-grandson of the family who built it. The house is a modest wooden building on the shores of a lake just outside Berlin, and it has been the unwitting witness of some of the major historical events of the last 100 years: the rise of Nazism and World War 2, and the building (and later destruction) of the Berlin wall in its very own garden. But although the book tells of significant ‘world’ events, the human personal stories of the lives of the four families who occupied the house during turbulent times, come across as just as important. The sense of time passing is powerfully told through word and image: rapidly, as the families arrive, make the house their own with light and laughter, and then leave, often forced to depart in a hurry; and slowly, as seasons come and go in the empty house, cobwebs form over dark windows and cold winds blow down cold chimneys. Brita Teckentrup’s images capture this passing of time perfectly. Shadowy figures haunt the pages like ghosts or faded photographs and muted tones alternate with colour and light to reflect the sad and happy times the house has witnessed. The book ends with a new lease of life and a positive outlook as the house is recreated as a centre for education and reconciliation.



Photo by Mary-Louise Maynes.

## *New Zealand (2000) ‘Our Country’ series*

BY ALISON TAYLOR, SEDI LECTURER

I acquired this non-fiction book back in 2000, when the school library was getting rid of its ageing stock. It was good timing because a friend had suggested we register to teach in New Zealand and I thought it might give me an insight into what to expect. What I loved about the book was that each brief chapter gave ‘in a nutshell’, accessible information but also the perspective of various Kiwi children, giving personal snapshots of what it was like in the ‘Land of the Long White Cloud’. The headings, text boxes and beautiful photographs worked their magic and brought New Zealand to me. Having visited the country five times since, I can honestly say that the culture, scenery, lifestyle and people were just as beautiful as the book portrayed.



Photo Alison Taylor.



Regular feature: These books moved us (continued)

## *The Lost Words: A Spell Book*, (2017)

BY GILLIAN HOUNSLOW, ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDENT



Frog.. Original drawing by Xander, Year 10 Secondary School Student



Photo by Gillian Hounslow.

Beginning with the words 'Once upon a time ...', this enchanting book paints a picture of a world that is losing its bond with nature. By utilising the magical connection between the natural world and poetry. Reading aloud spells [acrostic poems] children can revive the lost words and bring them back to life.

Each spell has three stunning and complex illustrations by Jackie Morris, which captivate and engage the imagination. First, the hidden word, second the subject, and lastly its natural habitat. Morris employs gold throughout as 'It is told in gold – of the goldfinches'.

Conceived as a response to everyday words from nature being removed from children's dictionaries. Words like Acorn, Bramble, and Dandelion,

Macfarlane explains, 'We've got more than 50% of species in decline. And names, good names, well used can help us to see and they help us to care. We find it hard to love what we cannot give a name to. And what we do not love we will not save.'

*The Lost Words* is a beautiful book which inspires conservation of the natural world and preservation of its lost words.



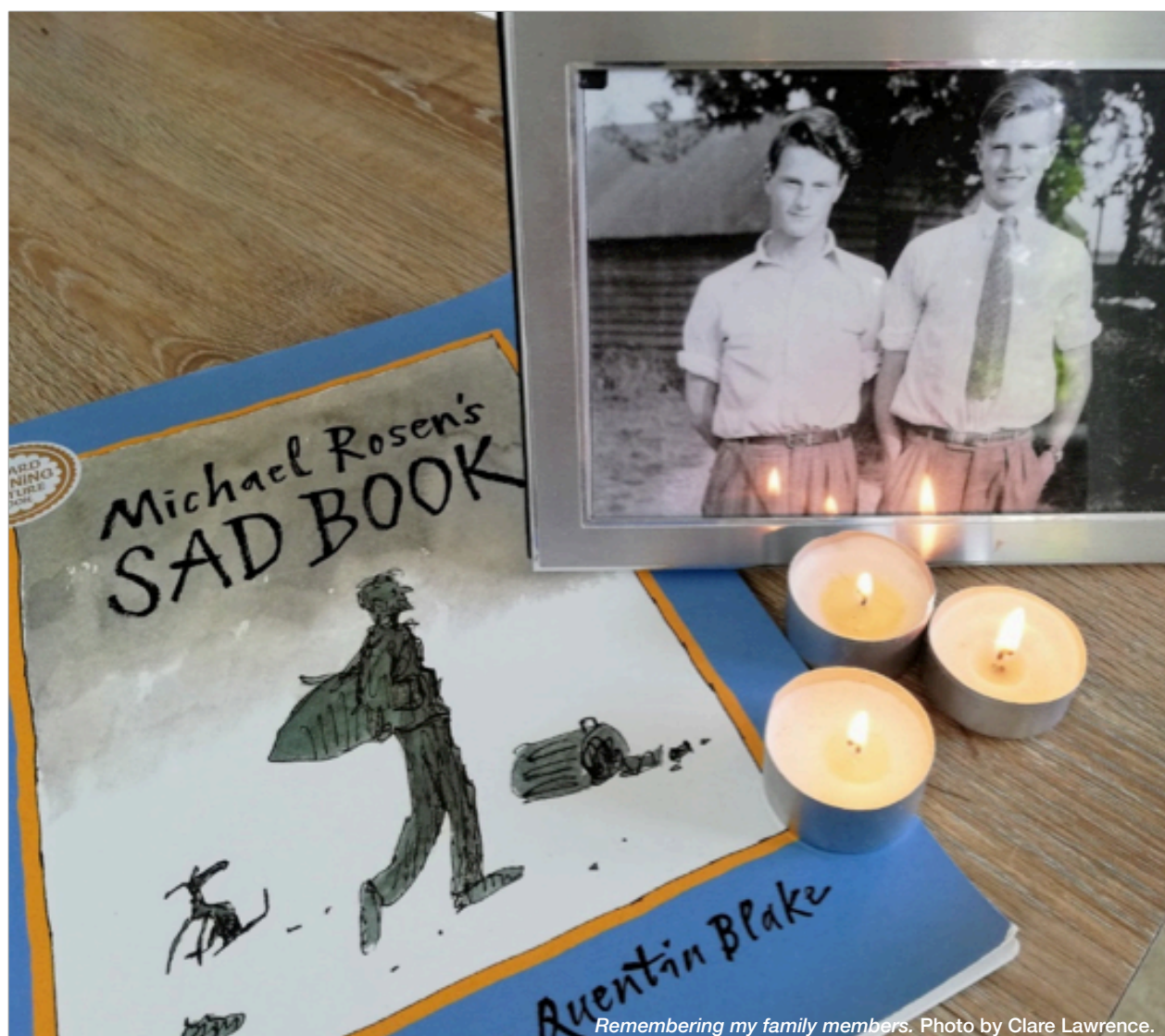
Jackie Morris is a favourite among staff across the BGU campus. Illustrations from another Morris book, *The Cat and the Fiddle: A Treasury of Nursery Rhymes*, are featured graphics in the Teaching Resources Collection at the BGU Library.



Morris illustrations in TRC. Photo by BGU Library.

## *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* (2000)

BY CLARE LAWRENCE, SENIOR  
LECTURER IN TEACHER DEVELOPMENT



*Remembering my family members.* Photo by Clare Lawrence.

I am a bit obsessed with this book. When people die (and they do, sadly), I think that it just might hold the answer to the difficult question for those of us left behind of, 'What now?'. For me, it is a tremendous source of comfort, as Michael Rosen has shared the anger, frustration and pain of losing someone loved with such poignancy and wit. Quentin Blake's Illustrations are the perfect companions to the text. The very size, feel and shape of the book just work. I have given this 'children's book' to various adults when I thought it might help. I don't know if it does, but I think it might. If a non-fiction picture book can ever be said to be good in every sense of the word, I believe it is this one. It hurts, but it is perfect.



# Visiting the Magical World of Harry Potter

ARTICLE BY VICTORIA DALTON, ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDENT



Warner Bros. Studio prop used in filming the Yule Ball scene in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Photo by Rose Roberto.

Today, the story of Harry Potter certainly came alive when we took our three children on the Warner Brothers Harry Potter tour. It's been a long time coming and a trip that we've been looking forward to for quite some time. We were not disappointed! I must admit to a small lump in my throat when I saw the look on my children's faces. They were absolutely spellbound (excuse the pun) by the immensity of the staging. When the curtain is lifted on the great hall after a brief cinematic introduction, we were greeted by a huge room filled with floating candles, magic potions and spectacular set props.



In the Great Hall. Photo by Victoria Dalton.



'these wonderful stories...with such humble beginnings will live on in our hearts and minds for a very long time.' - Victoria Dalton

All the way around the tour (which takes around 3 hours to complete) there is wave after wave of excitement and intrigue. The special effects are breath-taking, from fire breathing dragons to creepy enchanted woods. There is certainly something for everyone on this tour and it was very apparent that these wonderful stories which started out with such humble beginnings will live on in our hearts and minds for a very long time.



Family photo at Warner Bros. Studio near exit. Photo by Victoria Dalton.

Warner Bros. Studio set used to film Hogwarts letters arriving at the Dursely home scene in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.



Photo by Victoria Dalton.

# I love reading, I *love* literature. But...why do an MA in Children's Literature and Literacies?

BY SIBYLLE ERLE, READER IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Our new MA Children's Literature and Literacies due to start in September 2021, will put literary, cultural and educational traditions of books, as well as the various uses of texts into an interdisciplinary context. This MA considers how books engage, involve, or puts off readers. It also explores what children are like and what happens when they read.

Books serve many purposes. Picking the right one for a child can be a challenge for those who spend much time with children, including teachers, parents or librarians. While there are objectively good books, what makes a boy or girl love one over another is completely subjective. There are several reasons that we read. Over the centuries, reading 'good' books, especially the Bible, was said to preserve a child's innocence and ensure his/her safety and personal salvation.

There are all kinds of assumptions about childhood (that it's precious time while also paradoxically frustrating because of one's powerlessness). The ending point of childhood is also not clear. When does one stop being a child, and how does the developing mind respond to learning through texts and pictures? What do pictures do to engage both children and adults? How has this changed over time? Whilst we cannot time-travel back to the C18th to ask children what they made of the books especially written for them, this MA does include many opportunities to develop projects with fieldwork that uses a variety of research methods to address questions you find fascinating. We are committed to supporting you and your research interests.

This MA champions a creative approach to the use of books, through the lens of literacies and firmly embraces the embodiment of text in the digital age. Literature for young people has its own history. Furthermore, books for children can be studied from a cultural perspective as well as a commodity, with numerical assessments in lucrative markets.

This MA encompasses concepts of 'child' and 'childhood' by surveying attitudes of literature through both adult and child perspectives, engaging creatively with difficult or challenging topics. This programme will also address a trend among certain academics, practitioners and educators to write about books for children in 'belittling ways,' ignoring the great skill of authors and graphic artists. This is called indexicality, when the process of high-level craftsmanship is so great, that the finished product renders the skill of the maker invisible. Thus, this interdisciplinary MA Children's Literature and Literacies will survey key methods, practices, genres and delve deeply into a dialogue about complex issues on education and its fascinating ideas and issues.

Teaching staff for this MA are part of The LiLi Research Knowledge and Exchange Unit consisting of different programmes (English, Education Studies, Early Childhood Studies, BA Primary QTS, PGCE programmes and the Library) across the BGU campus. But they are united in a shared passion for books for all ages. Join us from September 2021 on this new MA course.

