

# Sophisticated Picture Books

Sophisticated picture books, or picture books for older readers, have given authors and illustrators a wonderful opportunity to explore more complex issues and more sophisticated humour within the picture book format. The genre has provided an outlet for writing and sophisticated illustration of the type seen previously only on the pages of the New Yorker or Graphis magazines, as well as an audience more accepting of experimentation in style: surrealism, expressionism, realism, pop... all have flourished under the banner of sophisticated picture books. Standards for design and layout have also been high, the finished product often being hardcover and sumptuously produced with a price to match, although soft covers are recently making more of an appearance - *The Magpie Song* by Laurence Anholt for example.

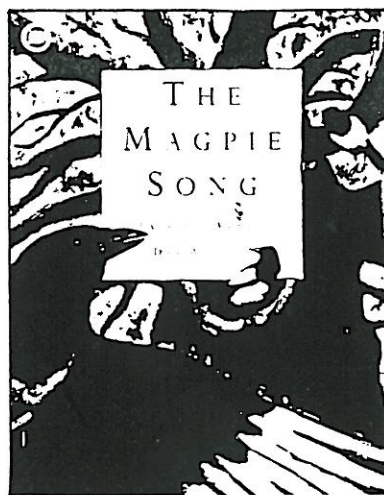
Accessible on many levels, sophisticated picture books have proved popular with many age groups. Although best suited to older readers (say 9-10 years onwards), younger children will often enjoy talking about the pictures even if they do not understand the concepts behind the text. Content and amount of text varies greatly, and the story is rarely straightforward. It always pays to read and understand yourself first before presenting a sophisticated picture book to students - try *The Drover's*

*Boy* by Ted Egan and Robert Ingpen, for example. (You will probably need to read it twice).

Sophisticated picture books provide many opportunities for discussion, study and shared delight with children whether as individuals or members of a group. We hope this list will give you some idea of what a superb resource they are and encourage you to hunt them out.

Selections are identified by the reviewers initials thus:

Betty Gilderdale (BG), Rosemary Tisdall (RT), Carol Ardern (CA), Sally Gallagher (SG), Judy Coleman (JC), and Susan McIntosh (SM).



## *The Magpie Song* ✓

by Laurence Anholt and Dan Williams

Picture Mammoth, London 1997

The text of this book is a series of letters between a young girl in a city apartment and her grandfather living in the family home in a far-off forest. They poignantly relate life's joys and

sorrows based on the traditional rhyme "one for sorrow, two for joy...". The letter format and the wonderful artwork make this a very visually appealing book and the content is heartwarming. Suitable for Year 5+. (CA)

## *Window* ✓

by Jeannie Baker

Random House, 1992

A wordless picture book dealing with environmental issues, this book covers a period of 24 years. The story is told in very detailed, well constructed collage pictures, and encourages readers to identify changes and interpret the sequence of events according to their own experiences. The artwork will inspire children to experiment with this medium. Suitable for 5 years upwards. (JC)

## *Zoom* ✓

by Istvan Banyai

Viking 1995

A fascinating book with no words at all. Each page builds on the page before it; "just when you think you know where you are, guess again. Nothing is as it seems..." (RT)

## *The Mousehole Cat*

by Antonia Barber and Nicola Bayley

Walker Books, London 1990

This book is based on an old Cornish legend of a fisherman's cat and her part in his survival in a storm. The cat's diet includes such wonderfully sounding dishes as baked hake, cooked kedgerree,

prime pilchards in pastry. Delicately detailed borders frame the text and exquisite illustrations reflect the detail of the descriptive writing. Year 5+. (CA)

### ***The Grizzly Revenge***

by Ruth Brown

Anderson Press Ltd London 1983 An original and intriguing book in which the animals wreak a terrible revenge on a hunting lord and his lady. (SM)

### ***Gorilla***

by Anthony Browne

Julia MacRae Books, London, 1983

Like all Anthony Browne books, this delightful story can be read at several different levels. Younger children will relate to the feelings of Hannah, whose father seems to have no time to do things with her, and enjoy the quirky illustrations. Older children (and adults) will study the pictures, find hidden details and bring wider experiences to their understanding of the story.

Suitable for 5 years upwards. See also *Piggybook* by the same author. (JC)

### ***The Tunnel***

by Anthony Browne

Julia MacRae, London 1989 Anthony Browne mixes reality and fantasy in this modern day fairytale in which a brother and sister discover their true natures. The illustrations perfectly complement the text, Browne being famous for his mix of the representational and the surreal. Archetypal imagery and symbolism make

every page a fascinating puzzle to explore, the book offering layer upon layer of meaning as you progress through the story. Well worth looking at in depth with children - the sort of book that sharpens the eye and the wit. (SG)

### ***Grandpa***

by John Burningham

Jonathan Cape, London 1984

An exploration of the relationship between a grandfather and his small granddaughter. (SG)



### ***Fish and Flamingo***

by Nancy W Carlstom and Lisa Desimini

Little, Brown & Co., Canada 1993

Wonderfully effective use of simple forms and deep colour make this a visually striking book. The story of the unlikely friendship between a bird and a fish has a strong message about the surprising gifts we share with others. Year 5+. (CA)

### ***Counting on Frank***

by Rod Clement

Harper Collins, 1990

Winner of an Honour Book Award from the Children's Book Council of Australia, this highly individualistic book is about Frank, who sees everything in terms of mathematical concepts. He fills his notebook with all sorts of facts ranging from the length of a line a ballpoint pen can draw before it runs out, to how many jelly beans are in the average lolly jar. A book to get children thinking. Suitable for 8 years +. (JC)

### ***Sadako***

by Eleanor Coerr and Ed Young

Margaret Hamilton Books, Sydney 1995

An amazing picture book version of Sadako, a child damaged by bomb radiation at Hiroshima. The story focuses on determination and hope. Delicate, misty illustrations in soft colours give way to subdued dark tones as the sadness in the story develops. However, the story ends with the hope of many "This is our cry, this is our prayer: Peace in the World". (CA)

### ***The Coming of the Surfman***

by Peter Collington

Red Fox, Random House, London 1993

Part fantasy, part reality, this story acts as a modern day fable. The surfman is a nameless character who arrives in a down-at-heel area of New York, an area frequented by warring neighbourhood gangs. He sets up shop and converts a disused factory into a surfing wave machine, hiring out boards to all comers and managing to bring colour,

purpose and peace to both sides, for a while. (SG)

***The Silver Cow - A Welsh Tale***

by Susan Cooper and Warwick Hutton

Chatto and Windus. London 1983

This is a traditional story retold by Susan Cooper, illustrated in soft pastel shades. It tells the tale of a magic silver cow discovered one day by Huw Hughes as he sat playing his harp by a lake high in the Welsh hills. Huw's father, Gwilym was attracted by the large amounts of milk the cow gave and became mean and greedy. The Tylwyth Teg, the magic people had to teach him a lesson.

Suitable for 8 - 11 years. (JC)

***Lucy's Bay***

by Gary Crew and Gregory Rogers

Jam Roll Press, Queensland 1992

A young boy revisits the bay where his sister drowned and finally comes to terms with her death. Try also *The*

*Watertower*. (SG)

***Bright Star***

by Gary Crew and Anne Spudvilas

T.C. Lothian, Melbourne 1996

The Bright Star of the title could refer to either the comet discovered by the 'Star Man' or the girl in the story who in the late 1800's in Australia, showed an interest in things outside the daily chores and activities of her time. An excellent book for encouraging young people to follow their dreams.

illustrations ably convey the time of the story's setting and the emotions of the child. Year 5+. (CA)

***The Drover's Boy (a ballad)***

by Ted Egan and Robert Ingpen

Lothian Books Melbourne 1997

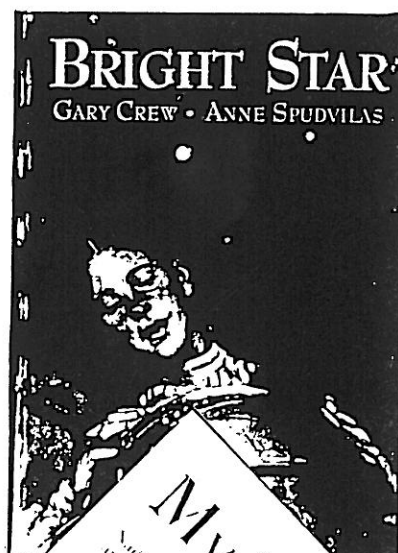
Based on historical fact, this is a tribute to the Aboriginal women who worked, disguised as men, as "drover's boys" on cattle ranches in Northern Australia. Robert Ingpen has illustrated the words of the ballad with haunting intensity. (SG)

***Panda's Puzzle and His Voyage of Discovery***

by Michael Foreman

Hamish Hamilton, 1977

A voyage of self-discovery for the Panda, who travels the world trying to find out if he is a black bear with white bits, or vice-versa. The illustrations reflect the author's travels overseas, and suit beautifully the gentle and appealing story. Suitable for 8 years +. (JC)



***Sir Cedric Rides Again***

by Roy Gerrard

Gollancz, 1986

A tale of gallantry from the days of knights told in sophisticated and highly amusing rhyme - full of subtle jokes. The illustrations are highly individual and detailed in Gerrard's unique style. Suitable for 9 years +. (JC)

***Asterisk Triumphant***

by Goscinnny and Uderzo

Hodder and Dargaud 1997

This publication includes 'Asterisk and the Big Fight' and 'Asterisk and the Roman Agent'. All the Asterisk stories tell, very hilariously, of how the indomitable Gaul manages to outwit the Roman invaders. Splendid cartoon type illustrations and wonderful puns. (BG)

***Peace Crane***

by Sheila Hamanaka

Morrow Junior Books, New York 1995

This book was inspired by the events of Hiroshima and the subsequent tradition of the origami crane. A young person reflects on the effects of discord and pollution in the present world and makes a plea for world understanding. The wonderful artwork is so appropriate to the text which is effectively placed on the double spread illustrations. Intermediate age +. (CA)

***Nutcracker***

by E.T.A Hoffman and Roberto Innocenti

Creative Editions 1996

A beautiful book - "after hearing how the toy nutcracker got his ugly face, a small girl

helps break the spell and changes him into a handsome prince". The richness and pleasures of Christmas will really come to life in this age-old story (RT)

### ***Rose Blanche***

by Roberto Innocenti

Harcourt Brace & Co, San Diego 1996

Superb illustration captures the atmosphere of war in this story of a young German girl's discovery of a concentration camp on the outskirts of her town during the Second World War. An expose of the tragedy and injustice of war as seen and suffered by a child. (SG)

### ***The Fisherman and the Theefyspray***

by Paul Jennings

Penguin Books Australia Victoria 1994

A simple tale about separation, compassion and survival. A story that will linger and leave you with much more than memories. (SM)

### ***The Wagon***

by Tony Johnston

Tambourine Books 1996

The beautiful, moving paintings in this book bring to life the voices of slavery and liberation - as a young boy slave dreams of freedom. (RT)

### ***Bamboozled*** ✓

by David Legge

Ashton Scholastic, Gosford 1994

When a young girl goes to visit her grandad, the most apparently normal scenes turn out, on closer observation, to be very strange indeed. A

simple story with quite extraordinary illustrations, full of visual jokes and allusions. (SG)

### ***Black and White***

by David Macaulay

Houghton Mifflin Co, Boston 1990

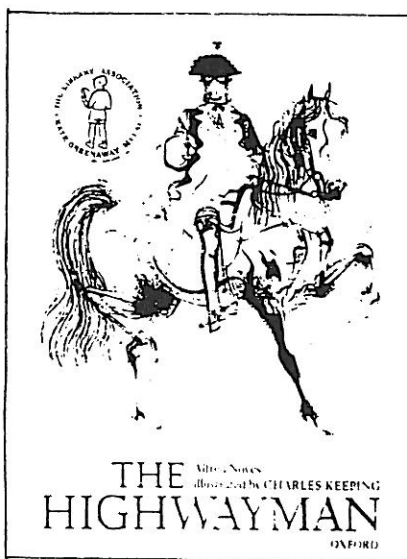
Careful inspection of both words and pictures reveals a number of interconnected stories in this inventive and entertaining book. A good one for children who enjoy puzzles. Winner of the Caldecott Medal. (SG).

### ***The Race***

by Christobel Mattingley and Anne Spudvilas

Scholastic Australia 1995

A very moving story of a teacher's realisation of the special needs of a child in her class. (The child is partially deaf). (SG, SM)



### ***The Highwayman***

by Alfred Noyes and Charles Keeping

Oxford University Press, 1992  
Carefully detailed black and sepia line drawings enhance

this classic tragic poem. The language is hauntingly beautiful (though somewhat gruesome). Intermediate age +. (CA)

### ***The Church Mice (a series of ten titles)***

by Graham Oakley

Pan MacMillan London 1992

These stories are told with a host of jokes and comic touches both in words and (even more) in the wonderfully detailed pictures. (SM)

### ***The Frog Prince Continued***

by Jon Scieszka and Steve Johnson

Viking (Penguin), New York 1991

A very funny sequel to the old tale set in modern times with superb illustrations rich in symbolism and humour. For children who know their fairytales this will be a source of much delight. Try also Scieszka's *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, and refer children to authors Roald Dahl and Tony Ross, who have also had fun reworking fairy tales. (SG)

### ***Mr Lunch Takes a Plane Ride***

by J. Otto Seibold and Vivian Walsh

Viking (Penguin), New York 1993

One of four "Mr Lunch" picture books featuring the adventures of small black and white dog and his friend, Ambrose the bird. Seibold's idiosyncratic, cartoon-style illustrations will delight in their humour and use of graphic conventions to convey meaning. (SG)

### ***The Whale's Song*** ✓

by Dyan Sheldon and Gary Blythe  
Red Fox 1993

Wonderful pictures which illustrate a gently implied conservation message as a young girl develops sympathy for the whales. (BG)

### ***Krakto Champion of the World***

by Philip Temple and Chris Gaskin

Hodder Moa Beckett, New Zealand 1995

With both a New Zealand author and illustrator this book is a must to share. The text using New Zealand mythology, flora and fauna portrays the triumph of courage and skill over arrogance and strength. The story is well paced and includes lots of direct speech which contributes so much to a good read-aloud. Strong artwork enhances the rich vocabulary. Year 5+. (CA)

### ***Mr Bear and the Bear***

by Frances Thomas and Ruth Brown

Red Fox 1997

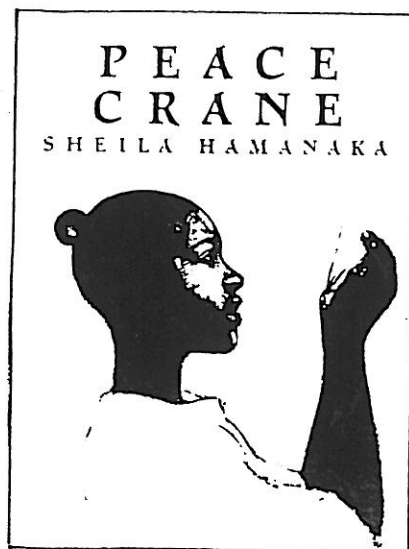
Written partly for the campaign to save wild bears, this superbly illustrated book tells the story of how a dancing bear was rescued in a medieval village. (BG)

### ***Jumanji***

by Chris Van Alsburg  
Houghton Mifflin Co, Boston 1989

This will be familiar to all movie goers, but the book still holds a special magic of its own. The black and white pencil illustrations are worth a special mention for anyone

studying or teaching the technique of drawing. Other superb sophisticated picture books by this author include *The Polar Express*, *Ben's Dream*, *The Wreck of the Zephyr* and *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*. (SG)



### ***Let the Celebrations Begin!*** ✓

by Margaret Wild and Julie Vivas

Omnibus Books (Ashton Scholastic), Sydney 1992

Based on a true story, this book is a celebration of the strength of the human spirit despite the most appalling conditions, such as those found in Belsen. (SM)

### ***The Witness***

by Robert Westall and Sophy Williams

Macmillan Childrens Books  
London 1995

The golden temple cat, stolen from Egypt finds shelter in a stable and witnesses the miraculous birth of the Christ Child. Later she is able to lead the family from her exile in Judea to theirs in Egypt. Illustrated in warm and glowing colours. (SM)

### ***My Place***

by Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins

Addison Wesley Longman, Australia 1996

Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year 1988. A ten year old girl describes her "place" - a terraced house in an Australian town, but this place has a long history, way back to when the first Aborigines set up camp by the stream that is now a polluted canal. From Laura's first description, each page steps back in time ten years, showing the changes that have occurred. A wonderful book that gives not only a sense of time past but an understanding that any "place" has a story as old as the land. (SG)

## **BEAUTIFUL BOOKMARKS**

The Wellington Children's Book Association are selling sets of five bookmarks to raise funds for their creative writing courses for children and older students.

Illustrators Clare Bowes, Bob Kerr, Kerry Gemmill, Christine Ross and Penny Newman have donated their talents, each bookmark being illustrated in a different style with details of the artist's work written on the back.

At \$2.00 per set of five we feel these handsome and colourful bookmarks are a great buy.

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Wellington Children's Book Association

PO Box 1242

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