

With so many excellent children's books, it's not surprising that adults are poaching from their kids' bookshelves. After all,

## Why Should Young Readers Have All the Fun?

by Lahring Tribe

You're not sure how it happened. Maybe you loved the books you read as a child, and never abandoned that love. Maybe you started reading to your children, and discovered a whole new world of pleasure. And now you have a dark little secret—you're an adult who enjoys children's books.

Stop feeling guilty or apologetic! You don't have to be ashamed or justify yourself. There are many wonderful books for kids that cross over impeccably to an adult readership.

Some of these books are simply beautiful objects in which design, text and illustrations blend in works that enthrall all ages. Take *The People Could Fly*, by Virginia Hamilton, illustrated by two-time Caldecott winners Leo and Diane Dillon. From the endpapers with their laminated feathers, to Hamilton's captivating tale of the magical words that allowed slaves to escape to the glowing paintings of people literally flying away from bondage, this book conveys everything from the bite of the overseer's whip to the universal human desire for freedom. Read this and feel your spirit soar!

Others tell stories as compelling as any adult novel. David Almond's Whitbread Award-winning *The Fire-Eaters*, set in northeastern England at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, tells of Bobby Burns and the sometimes-ordinary, sometimes-threatening, sometimes-magical world he inhabits. Ordinary, in the games he plays with his friends; threatening in the struggles he faces at school and the ominous illness of his father; magical

in his friend who can heal fawns with her dreams and a man who can eat fire, all executed in "prose that takes one's breath away" (*Booklist*). In *B for Buster* by Iain Lawrence, sixteen-year-old Kak is desperate to escape his abusive home, and enrolls in the Air Force—soon finding himself flying bombing raids. The expected glamour is replaced by terror—surely none of the other crewmen feel the same fear?

Sometimes our inner child needs nurturing. *Whittington* by Alan Armstrong will recall *Charlotte's Web* with its animal protagonists and barn setting, but it also features two children, Abby and Ben, who at eight can barely read. Inspired by Whittington the cat's retelling of his ancestor's story (his ancestor having accompanied Dick Whittington on his travels from medieval London to the Far East), Ben learns to read. No wonder—the book is unputdownable once the cat starts to spin his tale. Philip Pullman plays with elements from classic adventure stories and fairytales in *The Scarecrow and His Servant*, starring a scarecrow with a turnip head who comes to life when struck by lightning. Accompanied by his faithful servant, a boy he found sleeping in a barn, he goes off to seek fame, fortune and love in a series of adventures that echo *Don Quixote*, *Treasure Island*, and *Robinson Crusoe* for starters, battling the evil forces that are trying to usurp his inheritance. Laugh-out-loud funny in many places—Pullman inserts many touches that only an adult will understand—this is over-the-top storytelling at its best.

And why shouldn't adults get to read for fun once in a while? If you've had it up to here with your toddler's favourite bedtime story, take a break with Terry Pratchett's *Where's My Cow?* It starts out as a celebration of parents reading to children, echoing P.D. Eastman's classic *Are You My Mother?*, then deviates into delightfully Pratchett-esque mayhem. Finally, if you are on the verge of being driven mad by heartwarming Christmas specials on TV, you will find the perfect antidote in Anne Fine's acerbic *The More the Merrier*, featuring a family who put the "dys" in "dys-functional". Nutty Great Aunt Ida, crusty Great-Grandma, potato-hurling Uncle Tristram, and ghastly cousins Titania, Sylvester and Sylvia and their peculiar parents descend on the too-small Mountfield residence for three days of attempted merry-making and family bonding. The TV breaks, culinary disasters strike, and general mayhem erupts—a bit hard on young Ralph, but guaranteeing tears of laughter (if not a few moments of recognition) for the reader. **R**

