

England. Both books are fictionalized and Mary Anning becomes every bit as mythical a character as Red Riding Hood. They found immediate acceptance with Rachel, who gravitates more to princesses than plesiosaurs. *Stone Girl Bone Girl* looks and feels indistinguishable from any bedtime story. This tried-and-tested formula still had enough facts about prehistoric life to satisfy Phoebe.

The Fossil Girl goes one better and does the childhood of Mary Anning as a really sharp graphic novel. This got full marks from Gees

of all ages. Graphic novels could be the way to go: palaeoanthropology through the eyes of a six-packed Louis Leakey in the style of Judge Dredd? That has got to be better than *The Human Story*, the Natural History Museum's latest authoritative, uncool communiqué, brim-full of facts and threadbare on fun. Rachel says she might like such things, if they didn't have so many long words. ■

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character". Jacqueline Mitton understands this very well. Her books *Zoo in the Sky: A Book of Animal Constellations* and *Kingdom of the Sun: A Book of The Planets* (7–12 years) (pictured below), imbue the Sun, plants and constellations with character. Lavishly illustrated by Christina Balit, Mitton's stories clearly exhibit an understanding of the power of character and narrative for newly confident readers. Mitton does even better with *Galileo: Scientist and Star Gazer* (9–16 years). Here is the excitement of the discovery and exploration of science as unfolding narrative. A wonderful way of stimulating aspirant cosmologists.

A book that manages to bring together many of the key components of successful storytelling is David Donohue's *Moon Man* (8–14 years). This is a gripping and inventive account of young Walter Speazlebud's quest to find the truth about the 1969 Moon landings: fact or fiction.

Walter uses his power of Noitanigami — 'imagination' to those who sadly lack the ability to spell, talk and travel backwards. He travels back in time to 1969 to prove that the Moon landing happened. Granted, the Moon's surface does look a little like the Nevada desert. Granted too that Neil Armstrong botched his 'lines'. Walter's grandad said it happened, and even if he is getting confused in the head, he must be right. Walter proves this by mastering his gift of Noitanigami. His next task: to take his grandfather back in time, too, and rid him of his Alzheimer's disease. Marvellous. ■

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Star tales

Mark Brake

"If you want your children to be intelligent," Albert Einstein said, "read them fairy tales. If you want them to be very intelligent, read them more fairy tales." Stories are how we make sense of the world, they help shape what we see, do and dream. Children who have difficulties focusing in class will sit spellbound by a narrative.

There are a lot of studies on the power of stories; psychologists refer to information presented in story form as 'psychologically privileged'. Our brains, it seems, are especially attentive and responsive to information conveyed in a narrative. Stories greatly aid recall. They provide a meaningful structure — hooks upon which to hang new knowledge.

All this is a gift, you would have hoped, to communicators of science. Yet too many authors of children's science books pick up on one of the key strands of storytelling without taking the creative step of bringing them all together. And what greater story than space and the origin of our planet?

Narrative structures make more sense when causal relationships are

clear, and causality is key in Eric Maddern's *Earth Story* (8–13 years). This is a dramatic and nicely illustrated account of the origins of Earth. Maddern takes the reader on a journey from the enormous bang at the beginning of the universe through to the very first forms of life on our planet. But the book suffers from an otherwise limited and impersonal approach, with little suspense.

The use of complications and challenges in a narrative help to create a problem-solving scenario that involves the reader. *Stardust from Space* by Monica Grady (8–12 years) attempts to tell the story of stardust, and how it made our Solar System. But it is so replete and unrelenting in its presentation of data, one can almost hear Thomas Gradgrind, Charles Dickens's heartless utilitarian, screaming, "Fact, fact, fact!"

Strong, interesting characters are also essential to good stories. As F. Scott Fitzgerald went so far as to suggest, "action is

Earth Story

by Eric Maddern & Leo Duff (illus.)
Frances Lincoln: £5.99

Stardust from Space
by Monica Grady &
Lucia deLeiris (illus.)
Frances Lincoln: £11.99

Zoo in the Sky
by Jacqueline Mitton &
Christina Balit (illus.)
National Geographic: \$7.95

Kingdom of the Sun
by Jacqueline Mitton &
Christina Balit (illus.)
Frances Lincoln: £6.99
National Geographic: \$16.95

Galileo: Scientist and Star Gazer
by Jacqueline Mitton &
Gerry Ball (illus.)
Oxford University Press: £4.99

Moon Man
by David Donohue
Egmont Books: £4.99

