

old Luke put it: "The pictures are great and the parasites are amazing."

The frontier for pioneering authors and publishers, beyond the ever-popular dinosaurs and extant animals, is giving a feel for the nature of scientific research. *Famously Foul Experiments* (8–16 years) succeeds splendidly. Nick Arnold explores key experiments in the history of science using simple activities for the reader to do at home, short biographies of the scientists who first established the principles and a pithy explanation of the concepts. We are given Hubble and expanding balloons, Darwin and a game of natural selection using coloured paperclips, and Ibn Al-Haytham and the pin-hole camera, to name just a few.

In *The Global Garden* (6–12 years) by Kate Petty and Jennie Maizels, garden gnomes bearing schematic molecules of carbon dioxide and water appear on a page of pop-up plant nutrition to illustrate photosynthesis in this delightful book on the origins of food and the global economy. It is exciting to see authors effortlessly including plant biochemistry and physiology as part of a broader story, much as they are in life. Six-year-old Nell and 13-year-old Floss were both delighted by the gnomes — illustrating how the very best books appeal to readers of all ages. Similarly, Arthur Kornberg — yes, of DNA synthesis fame — spans the generations in *Germ Stories*. This collection of cautionary verses on microbiology were originally written for his grandchildren and many of the rhyming couplets are a delight to child and adult.

Some cultural commentators say that books are enjoying their final years of supremacy. Whether this is the case or not, recent competition from the new media has only been a good thing for children's science publishing. Books such as the ones reviewed here make the case for a strong future for the printed page. ■ Harriet Coles was formally Arts and Books Editor at *Nature* and is commissioning editor for this children's science book issue.

Why is snot green?

by Glenn Murphy

Macmillan: £4.99, \$10.31

The Goopy Chewy Rumble Plop Book

by Steve Alton & Nick Sharratt

Bodley Head: £9.99, \$17.99

Famously Foul Experiments

by Nick Arnold

Scholastic: £5.99, \$12.38

Horrible Science Annual 2008

by Nick Arnold

Scholastic: £6.99

What's Eating You?

by Nicola Davies & Neal Layton (illus.)

Walker Books: £7.99, \$12.99

The Global Garden

by Kate Petty; Jennie Maizels (illus.)

Eden Project/Random House: £12.99/
\$14.99

Germ Stories

by Authur Kornberg; Adam Alanz (illus.)

University Science Books: £22.50



SPUD GOES GREEN, EGMONT PRESS, ILLUSTRATION BY N. BAINES.

Young planet-savers

Tom Standage, with help from Ella (7½)

Their parents grew up in the shadow of a possible nuclear war. Children today are growing up in the knowledge that the environment is in peril — and that some actions make things better whereas others make things worse. Last year, my daughter Ella, then aged six, began to ask whether various activities, such as bouncing on her trampoline, "made global warming" or not. If Ella is any guide, her generation has picked up on the climate of ecological concern, but seems to have nebulous views about why they should be worried and what they should be doing in response. Ella is surely not alone in expressing particular concern for the fate of polar bears as the Arctic ice melts, a consequence of climate change that is much easier for a seven-year-old to grasp than are falling crop yields or desertification.

This combination of passion for the idea of environmentalism, and vagueness about details, is widespread among children. Publishers have spotted an opportunity and are rushing to publish environmental books for young readers. Some of these weave a subtle eco-message into a story, to instil a deeper understanding of natural processes and cycles; others are hectoring 'how-to' manuals that tell would-be planet-savers what to do.

Is That a Butterfly? is at the gentler end of the spectrum. A clueless bee and a well-informed snail watch and discuss the progress of tiny eggs as they develop into caterpillars and then

butterflies, in a simple tale that explains the idea of life cycles. Readers can lift flaps to see what is going on underneath leaves, and the book even manages to explain caterpillars' use of prickly spines as a defence mechanism. *Why Should I Protect Nature?* goes a step further and explains why it is in humans' self-interest to respect and preserve the environment. Global warming is not mentioned. The much simpler message is far more likely to resonate with children. If you pick flowers and swat bees, for example, "we'd have no honey for breakfast"; and if you leave litter in the countryside it might harm the farm animals that produce milk and wool.

The green agenda is more prominent in *George Saves the World by Lunchtime* (4–7 years) (pictured overleaf), a jolly book that makes fun of the mundane nature of planet-saving while delivering some admirably pithy explanations: "When you throw things away, you are also throwing away the materials, the time and the energy it took to make them." The hapless George expects saving the world to be swash-buckling stuff. Instead he is taught to switch the lights off, do the recycling, take toys and clothes to a charity shop, buy locally produced strawberries and so on.

Children get their own version of the grown-up "my year as an eco-warrior" genre in *Spud Goes Green* (8–12 years) (pictured). Formatted as a diary, it starts with young Spud's New Year's resolution to "go green" with the help of his friend Adi, who provides the advice on such