CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Less than three years ago it was predicted that the growth in video games and the rise of the Internet would mean the death for children's literature. But contrary to popular myth, children are reading more books than ever. A recent survey by *Books Marketing* found that children up to the age of 11 read on average for four hours a week, particularly girls.

Moreover, the children's book market, which traditionally was seen as a poor cousin to the more lucrative and successful adult market, has come into its own. Publishing houses are now making considerable profits thanks to new children's books. The main growth area has been the market for eight to fourteen-year-olds, and there is little doubt that the boom has been fuelled by the successful *Harry Potter*. J.K. Rowling's series of books has been so influential that they have helped to make reading fashionable for pre-teens. Harry Potter made it OK to be seen on a bus reading a book and, to a child, that is important.

'People still tell me, "children don't read nowadays",' says David Almond, the award-winning author of children's books such as *Skellig*. 'The truth is that they are skilled, creative readers. When I do classroom visits, they ask me very sophisticated questions about use of language, story structure, chapters and dialogue'. No one is denying that books are competing with other forms of entertainment for children's attention, but it seems as if children find a special kind of mental nourishment within the printed page. A few years ago, publishers lost confidence and wanted to make books more like TV, the medium that frightened them most. But books are not TV and children always say that the good thing about books is that you can see them in your head.

Children's authors are no longer considered sentimentalists or failed adult writers. 'Some adult writers would kill for the sales', says Almond, who sold 42,392 copies of *Skellig* in 1999 alone. And advances seem to be growing too: UK publishing company *Orion* recently negotiated a six-figure sum from US company *Scholastic* for *The Seeing Stone*, a children's novel by Kevin Crossley-Holland, the majority of which will go to the author.

Children's books are surprisingly relevant to contemporary life. If they are handled with care, few topics are considered off-limits for children. One senses that children's writers enjoy the chance to discuss the whole area of topics and language. But some authors are concerned that the British writers still ignore children's culture, as it is considered worthy but boring.

At the moment, the race is on to find the next *Harry Potter*. The demand for books at a recent children's Fair was as fierce as anything anyone has ever seen, which predicts a long-term future for the market, and for children's authors, who have traditionally suffered the lowest profile in literature, despite the responsibility of their role.

A. Decide whether the following sentences are True, False or Not given.

1. Girls do not read as much as boys.
a. True b. False c. Not given

2. Children's books used to be considered less important than adult books.
a. True b. False c. Not given

3. Children like books because they like to imagine things happening.
a. True b. False c. Not given

4. A lot of adult book authors are starting to write children's books in order to make more money.
a. True b. False c. Not given

5. It is expected that the market for children's books will start to decline soon.
a. True b. False c. Not given

B. Choose the answer that fits best according to the text.

6. J.K. Rowling's books
a. have made publishers earn a lot of money
b. have contributed to make children read more
c. are fashionable only for teenagers
d. are the only books that have been successful

7. According to David Almond, children
a. used to read more in the classroom
b. aren't interested in other forms of entertainment
c. like books as much as television
d. are curious about the whole writing process

8. The prestige of children's authors has risen

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a. due to the great amount of books they sell
b. because publishing houses retain the rights of the books
c. despite competition among publishing houses
d. but not as much as adult book writers'

9. According to some authors,
a. writers should write more about children's own topics
b. there are topics and language which shouldn't be used
c. not all topics are appropriate for children's books
d. children should decide what they want to read about

10. The conclusion of the article
a. highlights the success of the Harry Potter series
b. suggests that children have to read even more
c. remarks the importance of children's authors
d. sums up the benefits of children's literature

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