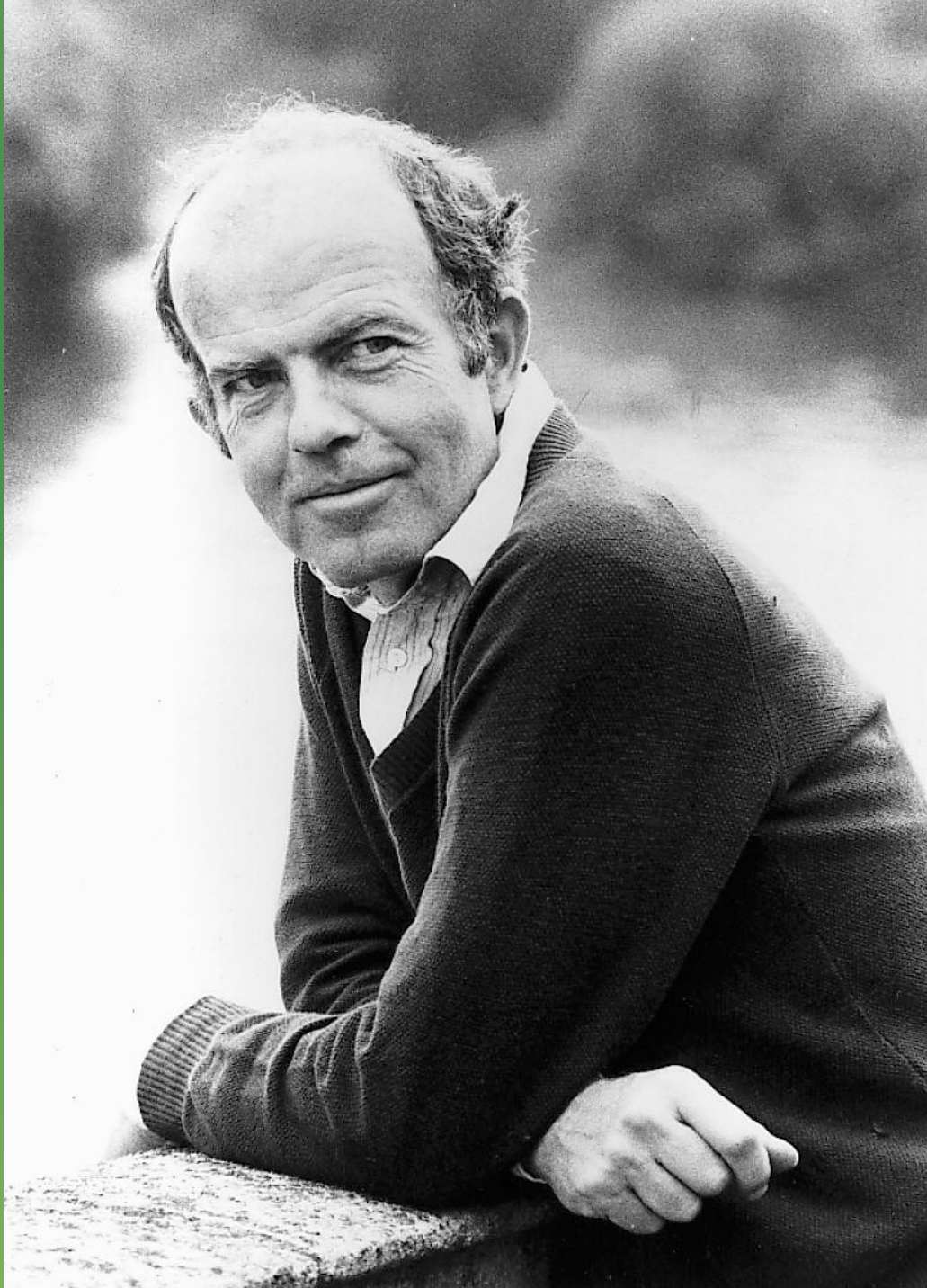


**John Burningham**

**Hans Christian Andersen Awards 2014**

**UK Illustrator Nomination**



## John Burningham Biography

John Burningham was born in Farnham, Surrey in 1936. He was brought up in a warm and unconventional family, and spent some of his childhood living in a caravan in the countryside, which he remembers vividly: "For a small child, living in a caravan is wonderful...It was the real countryside, paradise for children but hard on my parents." John was sent to a succession of progressive co-educational schools, eventually arriving at perhaps the most famous alternative school in Britain, Summerhill, when he was thirteen. Here lessons were not compulsory, and whether you went to class or not depended on your liking for a subject. John had a keen interest in art and drawing, which his mother encouraged, and at Summerhill he spent all his time in the art room. "I was drawing all the time," he remembers. He says he still doesn't know what makes a good education, "It's such a brief amount of time although it seems an eternity when you are at school."

When called up for his military service, John registered as a conscientious objector, and, for two and a half years, worked at a variety of socially useful jobs, which included school building in Italy and demolition work in Israel. Of his time working abroad, he says, "It's something young people ought to be able to experience today. When you share physical work, there is an accord and understanding even if you don't speak the same language."

Throughout his Alternative Military Service, John continued to draw and when he returned to England he studied at the Central School of Art, where he met his future wife, Helen Oxenbury. She was then studying theatre design, but was later to have a career as illustrious as John's in children's illustration. After graduation, they both spent some time working in Israel. When they returned to England, John worked as a freelance illustrator and taught part-time at art colleges, until getting a break-through commission to design posters for London Transport: creating images which have become classics of their kind. At the same time, in

a small ring-back notebook, he had been writing an illustrated story about Borka, a goose with no feathers. This was published in 1963 to instant acclaim, winning the Library Association's Kate Greenaway Award for illustration.

Following the success of *Borka*, John has worked largely, but never exclusively, on creating picture books that he both writes and illustrates. He quickly established himself as in the forefront of British picture book creation, producing a body of original work which includes classic titles like *Mr Gumpy's Outing*, *Granpa* and *Come Away from the Water, Shirley*, which were hugely popular, and also defined and extended the art of the picture book. Like any major artist, his work has changed and developed; but, in his empathy with children, his belief in the power of their imagination, and his mastery of technique, it is always inimitably Burningham.

Beside his work as an illustrator, John is an eclectic collector of old domestic furniture and fittings and architectural fragments which he incorporates into his two houses, one in Britain and one in France. He says, "I have always used bits and pieces from condemned buildings because I can't bear the waste of materials or the lack of respect for the skill of the craftsmen who were paid peanuts to make them." He was able to indulge his interest in architecture when the West Japan Railway Company invited him not only to write a story featuring the country's first steam engine but to design three railway carriages and two earthquake-proof station buildings for Expo 90. The story was published as *Oi! Get off our Train* and the buildings are still used by Japanese rail travellers.

John is a personally modest man who is content to let his work speak for itself. He has always sought to produce work that engages, entertains, stimulates and breaks new ground.

## John Burningham An Introduction

This year, 2013, is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of John Burningham's first book for children, *Borka, the Adventures of a Goose with no Feathers*. In the years since its publication, John has published more than forty books for adults and children, which have been widely translated and have sold more than four million copies worldwide. Most of the books from this remarkable career are still in print, and John is still working, with two new children's books due out later this year. So our selection of ten books can only be an inadequate introduction.

John's books are remarkable in many ways. While being hugely popular with the audience for which they are intended, children and parents, they have also been used extensively by teachers, especially within early years and elementary level education; and have been the subject of academic studies. John is one of those pioneers of picture book creation whose books can be said to have explored and mapped out some of the possibilities of the picture book as an art form, but he has never lost sight of the writer and illustrator's first obligation to entertain his readership. John has always been interested in both text and illustration and, unlike some of his contemporaries, has only rarely illustrated the work of other writers. He has explained this as an urge to always create something new, and it is his mastery of both words and pictures and the way that they interact that has created such compelling books and pushed the boundaries of picture book storytelling.

*Borka* and the four other animal tales that followed it, between 1963 and 1969, might be seen as the first phase of his career. Quite lengthy texts, with conventional narrative structures, they are striking for their absurdist stories of expertly characterised eccentric animals and their equally eccentric human companions; and their bold, exuberant illustrations. They demonstrate some of the qualities which characterise John's entire career: humour; the ability to hold together surreal events with dramatic timing and emotional truth; and sympathy for outsiders. Lydia Kokkola's<sup>1</sup> discussion of *Borka*

identifies Borka as a goose who, if lacking feathers, nevertheless, through the love of family and friends and her own courage and ingenuity, finds a place in the world. It is a tale that speaks simply and positively to any child who feels in some way inadequate.

In 1970, *Mr Gumpy's Outing* initiated a new phase in John's career. Discussed by Perry Nodelman<sup>2</sup> as displaying the quintessential qualities of the modern picture book, it began a new style of narrative, which Brian Alderson<sup>3</sup> has called "elastic-sided storytelling". Rather than the conventional narrative structure developing through a beginning, middle and end, it employs a series of repeated encounters as two children and a number of animals board Mr Gumpy's boat, each time being warned by Mr Gumpy to behave themselves. Once they are all aboard, they inevitably do all the things they were told not to, and the boat tips them and Mr Gumpy into the river. This pattern of storytelling is "elastic-sided" in the sense that, as Alderson says, "The only constraints are narrative effect – don't go on too long or the whole thing gets boring – and, at a fundamentally practical level, the number of pages available through which the cumulation may build." This form of storytelling, perhaps partly derived from folk tale, provides the narrative structure not only for a large number of John's books that came after, but has been adopted by many other picture book creators.

Clare Bradford<sup>4</sup> identifies another aspect of this simple, resonant and satisfying tale, when she discusses the relationship between Mr Gumpy and his passengers. Here Mr Gumpy, the adult authority figure, lays down rules to limit the risk of the river trip. The rules are flouted, but not only does Mr Gumpy reward the children and animals with a wonderful tea party, but the result of the rule breaking is the most joyous double page spread of the moment when everybody is tipped into the river. It is as if Mr Gumpy has conspired with the children and animals in a game to get the greatest excitement from their outing.

The theme of the relationship of children to adults recurs again and again in John's work, with strikingly different treatments but always carefully observed and firmly on the side of the child. In *Come Away from the Water, Shirley*, the parents' and the child's separate responses to the seaside are divided by the book's gutter, creating a textual and visual tension, the only words being those of the prosaic and anxious parents, who are depicted in thin line and colour washes on one page while Shirley's silent imagination fills the opposite page with glorious technicolour adventures. *Where's Julius* replays this theme, but here the parents are understanding and indulgent of their son's adventures. The much later story, *It's a Secret*, also celebrates a child's independent life of the imagination and supplies a new setting for the folk tale of *The King of the Cats*.

In *Granpa*, as in *Shirley*, we overhear scraps of conversation, but this book's focus is a dialogue between a grandfather and granddaughter who enter into one another's imaginative worlds. They fall out only once, the child being gently admonished by the voice of another family member, whose presence is heard, but never seen: "That was not a nice thing to say to Granpa." This delicate meditation in three voices is bold in concept, and subtle and moving in its treatment of old age, childhood and the strength of familial affection.

*Granpa*, like many of John's books, has its origin in his own family life. *Avocado Baby* was suggested by his youngest daughter's favourite diet. In this book, there is a fairy tale reversal, where the family's youngest and weakest member, through a diet of avocados, becomes its protector and champion. A bizarre tale, it hilariously overstates the case that even the smallest child has an important place in family life. Family tenderness is celebrated too in *Hushabye*, in which a quiet, lilting chant sends a number of animals and other characters, including the man-in-the-moon, to their beds. John has described it as "a visual lullaby...an attempt at the ultimate sending-a-child-to-sleep book."<sup>5</sup>

He had envisaged the book as being accompanied by a musical box that could be left playing by the child's bed after the story was over. Unfortunately,

the musical box was never produced. *Aldo* is the darkest of John's books about a child's place in the world, where a lonely and neglected child relies on an invisible rabbit to be his only friend.

John has said that each new book is a challenge – "a sort of headache that has to be solved" – because writing and illustrating for children requires work that is direct and accessible but yet has meaning and depth. Each work needs its own technique and resolution. He has always been a social commentator. This is explicit in his adult work, but largely implicit in his work for children. *Oi! Get Off our Train* is one of the exceptions, offering a wildlife conservationist theme, which is cleverly tied to the way in which both possessiveness and openness have a place in the friendships of young children. *Oi! Get Off our Train* also demonstrates John's two major strengths as an illustrator, his deft characterisation and his breathtaking ability to render light and landscape, whether in the quiet pastoral of *Mr Gumpy's Outing* or the swirling storms of *Oi! Get Off our Train*. Both of these facilities John ascribes to the action of imagination on careful observation and he hopes his work will inspire his child readers, too, to look carefully at the world around them and to trust in their own imaginations.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Kokkola, Lydia. "The 'preposterousness' of John Burningham: complexity made accessible." *Bookbird* 50 (4) October 2012, 56-60
- <sup>2</sup> Nodelman, Perry. "Decoding the images: illustration and picture books." In Peter Hunt ed. *Understanding Children's Literature*. London: Routledge, 1999, 69-81
- <sup>3</sup> Alderson, Brian. "On the tightrope in Burningham land." *Books for Keeps* 143, 2003, 1-4
- <sup>4</sup> Bradford, Clare. "Along the road to learn: children and adults in the picture books of John Burningham." *Children's Literature in Education* 25 (4) 1994, 203-211
- <sup>5</sup> Burningham, John. *John Burningham*. London: Random House, 2009, 206



## John Burningham interviewed by Nicolette Jones for The Sunday Telegraph 22 May 2009

John Burningham has lived with his wife, the illustrator Helen Oxenbury, in the same Hampstead house for 30 years. It is embellished with stained glass windows and gothic doors, a decorative stone fireplace from Somerset and a window seat that once belonged to Lillie Langtry. It is full of Victorian features found on building sites and, more recently, on eBay. In the garden there is a stone fountain from a French square and a belfry that once adorned an English church. Burningham has become expert at how to move masonry and glass across counties and even countries. It is the home of someone who not only has an eye, but also the imagination to think big.

It fits with the picture books he has made - about 50 of them since *Borka: the Adventures of a Goose with No Feathers* was published in 1963. His are quirky stories that reflect his enthusiasm for Ronald Searle, Saul Steinberg and the French cartoonists André François and Albert Dubout, and his interest in landscape and light. They also resonate with big ideas, though he insists that they contain “no propaganda whatsoever”. Still we agree, as we chat overlooking the garden and the belfry, that *Edwardo: the Horriblest Boy in the Whole Wide World* expresses a principle which could valuably be applied not just to child-rearing but to the penal system and even to foreign policy. Edwardo behaves badly when he is criticised and punished, but becomes kind and useful when, even in the face of his wrongdoing, he is given opportunities. “We are beginning to see it now even on an international level that you can’t just keep bombing people and expect them to change their ways. It isn’t going to work,” says Burningham. The world could learn a lot from Edwardo.

Although his work is underpinned by liberal values, Burningham is not didactic. “As soon as you start to deliberately put messages across, it’s like a Seventh Day Adventist on the doorstep. You realize you are being got at.” His guiding principle is different: “The 11th Commandment should have been ‘Thou Shalt

Not Bore’.” He deplores what he calls a “party food approach” to books for children: the belief that “lots of colours and pretty pictures will do when there’s no content. Children get very quickly bored. Colour means absolutely nothing unless it is used to some effect.”

This month sees the publication of *John Burningham*, a handsome anthology of his work and memoir of his life. It reveals that his own childhood was unconventional. He went to nine different experimental boarding schools, ending with a few years at Summerhill. His family lived during the war in a caravan in various rural locations, renting out their home to pay school fees for three children. Burningham’s mother was a Froebel-trained teacher; his father, an RE teacher, was a pacifist who had been awarded a military medal in the First World War. “He never said what it was for. He just said, ‘Oh they must have had a lot of extra ones, so they gave me one’.”

Burningham left Summerhill with a school certificate in English literature but failed other subjects, including art. Six years later he left the Central School of Art (where he met his wife) with a distinction in design. In the meantime he had also been a conscientious objector, serving Alternative Military Service in farms, forests and building sites in Sussex, Hampshire, Glasgow, Italy and Israel. He then made posters for London Transport, and fell into children’s books when he was encouraged to submit *Borka* for publication.

Burningham’s books have now sold more than four million copies worldwide and he has won the Kate Greenaway Medal for children’s illustration twice, for *Borka* and for *Mr Gumpy’s Outing*, which is now a primary school mainstay. He also won an award for *Granpa*, which is based on the relationship of his daughter Emily (the youngest of his three children) with Helen’s father, who used to live next door. “People say *Granpa* is about death. I think the point of it is the relationship between the very young and the very old. There is a bonding,

especially between grandfathers and young children.” His other daughter, Lucy, has three children but, he says, “We are hopeless grandparents, Helen and I, because we are so incredibly busy. This idea that Grandpa has retired, and Grandma has nothing to do except look after children and can’t wait for another set of babies - we are not like that; we work harder than we did even 20 years ago. Getting older makes you want to get on with your work, while there is still time.”

He does fewer school visits than he used to, deterred by audiences of “TV-orientated kids wriggling away with boredom” and an ungracious schoolteacher in Dunfermline who suggested that his long and difficult journey had been a jaunt that wasted the Scottish Arts Council’s money. “I’m not a kind of Pied Piper figure. Children rather frighten me.” In fact, he says, “I am not thinking about [children] when I do this at all. I never do anything differently because it’s for children.” As he says in his memoir, “I am not trying to make a landscape that children can understand. I am just making a landscape.” He also takes the view that picture book texts are “2,000 words pruned down to 80”. This is why his books are not “party food”, but works of substance, that entertain the parents and teachers that read them as well as the children.

Each picture book is a set of problems to be resolved. “I am trying, I suppose, to break new ground every time. I could have settled for the endless adventures of Mr Grumpy, which would probably commercially have been better than doing obscure, different things.” The different things included such memorable animal characters as Humbert, a rag-and-bone-man’s horse who

gets to lead the Lord Mayor’s parade; Simp, a dog based on Helen’s rotund pet Lulu, who is fired out of canons at a circus and Courtney, a mongrel with unexpected talents for playing the violin and rescuing a baby from a burning house. Burningham has illustrated *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *The Wind in the Willows* and (by retracing Phileas Fogg’s journey) *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

He is a great celebrator of the imagination: in *The Magic Bed*, a bed found in a junk shop transports a child on adventures; in *Where’s Julius?*, in *Come Away from the Water, Shirley* and in *It’s a Secret!*, his latest, children’s play brings them amazing experiences. The style of his picture books is spontaneous, though the textures are often carefully worked. He does his drawings quickly, but only after a great deal of rehearsal. “I do lots and lots of sketches of what the characters are going to be like. I have to know them all before I start working.” There is nothing better than when a drawing works but when it doesn’t - this is the horror of the arts: because you have been doing it for 50 years, it doesn’t guarantee that you can ever make colour work again.”

This anxiety has not slowed his productivity. He is planning an exhibition in Edinburgh which will include, if possible, a huge copy of a Burningham gorilla hanging from the rafters. And he is making a music box out of his book *Hushabye*. “The idea is, you read the book, leave the music box and make your retreat. My memory of reading to children was that it’s absolutely fine while you are reading, and then when you are trying to get out they jerk themselves awake.” He may not claim to be a Pied Piper, but he knows what parents need.

## An Interview with John Burningham

What follows is an interview with Richard Harvey, who describes himself as a “psycho-spiritual psychotherapist, author and spiritual teacher” (see <http://www.therapyandspirituality.com>)

**Richard Harvey:** John Burningham’s books are rarely on the shelves in our house. They are usually on the floor getting looked at or they are being read. A prolific children’s author, his books include *Borka, Granpa, Mr. Gumpy’s Outing, Cannonball Simp and John Patrick Norman McHennessy - the Boy Who Was Always Late* (which names a very few). He has been producing books since 1963. He is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards for his work and for some of us he is the most astute, fearless and penetrating living writer of children’s books.

John Burningham: I started with *Aldo*, the story of a solitary child’s secret/invisible friend. Since then I get at least one of his books each year – from the kids – and I’m hooked. *Oi! Get Off Our Train* is a particular favourite of mine, highlighting our environmental plight (it is dedicated to Chico Mendes). *Mr. Gumpy’s Outing* is another - a magical tale in which, characteristically, Burningham is deceptively simple in both text and illustration. His writing is rare in its truth, sincerity and authentic grasp of the world of the child. It was with this in mind that I approached him through his publishers to give an interview to *Inspired Fatherhood*. After some months I spoke with him and he agreed to give the interview of which the following is a faithful transcript. He impressed me as a thoughtful, considered and modest man, a real delight to talk to and, as I might have suspected, an unselfconscious purveyor of wisdom - Ed

**Richard Harvey: What is the role of children’s literature?**

John Burningham: Well, I suppose to stimulate and interest children.

**RH: What are you communicating to children in your stories?**

JB: Well, I don’t know. I mean having said that children’s literature is to stimulate children... I mean there is not, in my estimation, a tremendous gap between adults and children, it is just one of experience and that if you produce, by and large, a successful book for children it often is something that adults actually enjoy, because after all they are the people who go out and buy things and they are the ones who have to suffer reading them night after night if they do work. But I personally never say, “Well, I’m going to do something for children”. I mean I have an idea and I obviously, I suppose, have an ability to communicate with children by being able to simplify what I produce.

**RH: So are you thinking of adults when you’re writing the books?**

JB: No, I’m not thinking of anybody. I’m just thinking of the problem of the book... I don’t ever think really of an audience. I just think of it as a sort of headache that has to be solved really.

**RH: I was noticing that the adult figures in your books, the parents and so on, are usually quite severe, unloving sorts of characters, nagging, the father is often absent – I’m thinking of *Oi, Get Off Our Train* or *Aldo* for example – and the benign presences that the children turn to in the books are usually animals – like *Courtney* - or imaginary figures like *Aldo* or otherworldly figures like those in *Cloudland* or idealised figures even. Why is that?**

JB: I really don’t know, I mean in the case of *Aldo* I think I definitely wanted to write something in that case for a huge sort of stable of children from broken relationships. I mean that was a deliberate move in the case of *Aldo*. In other cases well, I mean for example I don’t know if you know those books *Come Away From The Water, Shirley* and *Time To Get Out Of The Bath, Shirley*, on one page there is the sort of parents moaning about various er... they go to the seaside and its don’t get your feet wet, don’t step on the towel, mind that dog and all that sort of thing and the child’s carrying on

a fantasy on the other page. But really it's exploring two worlds, because once your child has inevitably let the sea go over his Wellingtons, or whatever it is, you're in for a tough afternoon and people say, "Oh, those dreary parents", I say, no, they're not dreary, that's the way it is.

So perhaps they are... I'm just trying to think about Courtney now... yeah, they're very dreary parents in Courtney certainly.

**RH: They're killjoys aren't they?**

JB: They are. Yes, absolutely.

**RH: One of the things that we feel as the adults buying the books - as you say - is that you've got a more authentic grasp of family life and the children's world, as we see it, than most other children's authors. It's hard to actually think of anybody who comes to mind writing children's books that enters into those areas as authentically as you do.**

JB: Well, that's very nice of you to say. I must say I don't make judgements. I'm not really particularly interested in what anybody else is doing in that field and it sounds a sort of rather dreary statement to make but I just get on with whatever problem I have in front of me, rather than looking at what everybody else is doing and if I manage to do that well, I'm glad to hear it from you.

**RH: What makes a bad children's story, do you think?**

JB: Oh god, I really wouldn't like to be able to say that. But I suppose what I personally don't like is any kind of... "I'm now going to do something for children and therefore we'll have lots of pretty colours and balloons and parties". Because they suffer they've got a boredom threshold which is much more acute than the adult one, which is rather nice, that you can't persuade a child to get interested in a story if he doesn't like it. I mean there's no way around that. But they do like... there are some really awful things that one might consider absolutely awful that children like, so it is a great enigma really I think. I have met people writing their essays and PhDs on children's y'know... what is behind children's stories and I feel sorry for them because

I just don't know or think that anybody knows. In fact I had somebody do a PhD on a book of mine called *Where's Julius?* Have you seen that one?

**RH: I don't know that one I'm afraid. There's so many you've written. I mean we've got a stack of them but you're mentioning ones we don't have.**

JB: Yes [laughs]. *Where's Julius?* is about a boy who... the parents are preparing a meal and they say, "Where's Julius?", and they say, "Well Julius is in the hall making a little home out of chairs and an old curtain and a broom", so you get the picture of Julius in the hall. So they take the tray to Julius. Then the next thing he's doing is he's digging a hole in the end of the garden to get to the other side of the world. So they take the tray to him there. Then he's in Egypt, then he's in Russia, then he's in, you know, wherever it is and each time one of the parents takes the tray to him and then the penultimate page is - you can hear the mother getting fairly desperate, saying is he doing this, is he doing that and is he in the North Pole and feeding this that and the other. And the father says, "No Betty, tonight Julius is coming to eat with us". Now this man wrote hundreds of pages on this story, trying to analyse it and completely missed the point. The point, as I saw it, was that you have all these different stages of development with your children which you may not enjoy as a parent, but you just have to tolerate them and, if you do and if you back them, then hopefully they'll come through it as sort of reasonable adults and this PhD just totally missed the point so I don't know what the ans... you know...

**RH: Could you respond to that, did you tell him that?**

JB: No, you can't [laughs] tell somebody who's written three hundred and... pages you've missed the point. I couldn't understand his PhD and he couldn't really understand my book so we left it at that.

**RH: That brings me to the next question because it is what do you think of the education system in this country?**

JB: Well... I find that very hard to say. I mean obviously the classes are too big, the teachers are



underpaid and so on... it worries me that we have this explicit belief that if we equip our schools with millions and billions of pounds worth of computers that that somehow is going to solve everything. I personally think that it's the relationship between a teacher and a small group of people that is important and I don't think it matters whether you're doing it in some old sort of hut somewhere. I think that the quality of the buildings or the quality of the equipment isn't what it's about. It's stimulation and it's a form of apprenticeship really. I think that apprenticeship is one of the better ways of learning something. But to get to say we've equipped the school with computers and we're now going to have a class of thirty-five people and sit them down and try and make them like Singaporeans, or whatever they'd be called, is not right, because I think in this country we are... the quality we have is innovation and originality and this should be encouraged.

*RH: How do you think spirituality should be approached in schools?*

JB: When you say spirituality, what do you mean - religious education?

*RH: I think I'm using spirituality... or to me it's something wider than religious education perhaps, but certainly encompassing that, yes. But I'm thinking also of the spiritual world of the child that may be outside of conventional religion.*

JB: I don't know. I probably am not quite picking up on what you're saying there.

*RH: For example, we send our children to a Steiner School, so that embraces a spiritual dimension, more so than the state school although religious education would be part of the teaching there. There could be an argument that says that in state school the spiritual dimension of the child is subordinated to religious instruction or something like this.*

JB: Yes. I think I'm vaguely familiar with the Steiner method which is that you proceed with English until you get tired of English and then you get on with history and then you do history and so on and so forth - you keep stimulating. What is I think extremely difficult to really know with education

is whether - and equally with being a parent - is whether it wasn't... I mean my parents made me do X and I hated it at the time but later on I was tremendously grateful and I've never been sure about that, because I've never been capable of doing that and this could be construed as being a weakness. So I'm never sure about the Steiner system. I went to lots of schools, including a Steiner at one point. I don't know, I don't have a fixed opinion because I think you can come down on so many sides with that sort of thing.

*RH: Do you see the role of the father changing in the 21st. century?*

JB: Well, I suppose that it must be changing now in that the classical role of father was always that he was the bread-winner and he went out to work and she cooked and cleaned and dusted and had babies and all that sort of thing. Well I suppose there are two factors now: there are so many one parent families, broken marriages that it could well change, yes, and probably for the better. I think that one of the most horrendous, anti-family things is commuting. I mean getting up at half-past six in the morning, disappearing and coming back tired after a couple of hours on the train or in the car or whatever, and having no time with your family is an absolutely appalling way to live, but we've structured our society like that and I think it's a great pity.

*RH: How far do you think that the roles of mother and father are culturally designated? Do you think that a man could effectively 'mother'?*

JB: I don't know. I suppose that the conventions are so entrenched, aren't they, that there is no reason why... I mean I don't know whether father could ever be a hundred percent mother, but he certainly could be an eighty-percent mother and we've now got this scenario with a sort of phobia about paedophiles that no male... I mean it's even frightening males out of the teaching profession. They don't even dare put their arm round a child and comfort it in case somebody starts assuming that they have other intentions. But yes, supposedly, I don't see why not.

***RH: How do you think the large numbers of single-parent families today will affect our society in the future?***

JB: I don't know. I know lots of children who are the products of broken marriages who seem to be perfectly alright. The great question, I suppose, is what's going to happen when they try to form family relationships at a later stage in the way that if you... you'll find that violent criminals were usually beaten up as children or abused in one way or another. So if they have the example of the parents breaking up, or having no parents, then perhaps they will perpetuate it and does it matter? - perhaps we all have to change.

***RH: How do you view 'the family'?***

JB: How do I view the family? Well, I think it's sort of as good as you can get really, I mean warts and all. I think grandparents are very underused. This is another thing about dispersed family because the role of the grandparent is very important and when the grandparents live two-hundred miles away and they're just sort of seen at Christmas, this is a great pity.

***RH: What is the role of the grandparent?***

JB: The role of the grandparent is that they have a sort of detachment. Parents are usually overanxious and overworked and sort of over everything and the grandparents can borrow children and hand them back. So they're semi-responsible and I think this is a tremendous contribution to upbringing to have that. They have all the love and all the attention but equally the grandparents can say, "Well, we never did this with our children. This was the failure, or whatever, and we're going to do it, because now we have the time with the grandchildren", and they also take the pressure off the parents.

***RH: So in that way it's two-way traffic. There's something in it for the grandparents also.***

JB: It is, yes, absolutely and it takes the grandparent off the back of the parent. So I mean this is sad in a way... with dispersed communities that you don't have this going on.

***RH: What are the ideal conditions for children's early years?***

JB: Well, I suppose they need love and security and an introduction to as many things as they can get, plus a lot of playing.

***RH: How do you think your own relationships with your mother and father have affected your life and work?***

JB: My life and work? I don't think as any kind of definite reaction or... I mean obviously one's parents have an effect on one in some way or other, but I really can't think how they affected my interest, I mean the choice of what I did was mine, not theirs, and I can't really see beyond that.

***RH: Who are the figures who have most helped to develop our understanding of ourselves in this century?***

JB: I honestly don't know because I am not well-read on all this sort of... I mean if you are talking of people like Freud and Jung and... you know those sort of people I am really not... Krishnamurti or whatever, I am so ill-read on that lot that I really couldn't answer that.

***RH: It's interesting you think of those figures perhaps?***

JB: Well you can say Stalin and Adolf Hitler, Mahatma Gandhi or what... I would find it very hard to answer.

***RH: What are the latest developments in your work?***

JB: I'm doing all sorts of things really. I've just finished a book on the French which was an almighty, huge amount of work. I'm doing another children's book. There's various things going into animated films. I've got lots of things going on really.

***RH: So the book about the French is for the adult market, is it?***

JB: Yes, that's adult.

***RH: Is that an academic work?***

JB: No, it's not. I did one on England about four years ago which they're going to reissue at some point. No, it's a hundred and twenty-eight pages of drawings and quotations really.

*RH: Why do you think that, in spite of all we now know, education in this country, and in most of the world, remains achievement-orientated and insensitive to the needs of the child?*

JB: Economic pressure or economic fear and that goes back to schools full of computers and then we'll make them as prosperous as they are in Singapore. There is this desperate panic that people have with children and young people. They cannot believe that a sort of "oafish" teenager is ever going to be a responsible adult and so I suppose that's what may cause it.

*RH: What advice would you give to actively-engaged fathers at this time?*

JB: When you say actively-engaged, what...? Actively-engaged with their children?

*RH: Yes, I'm thinking of the fathers who take an interest, who are not 'the commuters' you are talking about, and are actually engaged in the business of parenting.*

JB: Yeah, well I suppose one of the things you have got to bear in mind is you don't say, if a child's doing something which is driving you mad, and you don't want them to do it, there's no point saying, "Don't!", you just say, "Let's do something else". You divert and that's a kind of hot tip. It seems to work. Otherwise you just get a confrontation and that's very difficult to resolve with extremely young children.

*RH: I couldn't agree with you more about that and then in practice it's so hard to do sometimes.*

JB: Yes, because you're just irritated, tired or exasperated.

*RH: Which children's book, other than one of your own, would you most like to have written?*

JB: So you're saying what's my favourite children's book really, I suppose.

*RH: I suppose it could be that, but there's another meaning I think perhaps in it.*

JB: Oh right. There's a book that I loved as a child called *Brendan Chase* which was written by... a man who is the artist and the name escapes me now. He signed his name B.B., I know that. Yes, it might be about some boys who run away and live in the woods, some beautiful woodcuts. Dennis Watkins Pitchford was the man's name. Yes, I wouldn't have minded doing that.

*RH: Thank you very much.*

## John Burningham awards and other distinctions

1964	Awarded the UK Kate Greenaway Medal for <i>Borka, the Adventures of a Goose with no Feathers</i>	1989	<i>Oil! Get off our Train</i> receives the Parents' Choice Picture Book Award. Premiere of the film Granpa is held in London, with Peter Ustinov as the voice of Grandpa
1970	The French shadow puppet theatre Les Marionnettes du Manifole, perform <i>Borka and Trubloff</i> in Paris	1990	Expo 90 in Osaka, Japan features three carriages and two prefabricated station buildings, designed by John Burningham, and used on the Dream Express (Yoshitsune) for 183 days. The buildings are later dismantled and reassembled at Wakasa-Hongo station and later at Kaibara station
1971	Awarded the UK Kate Greenaway Medal for <i>Mr Gumpy's Outing</i> , the first illustrator to win it twice. It also wins the New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Books of the Year Award, and the Honorary Award from the Biennale of Illustrations, Bratislava	1993	<i>Harvey Slumfenburger's Christmas Present</i> receives the New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Book of the Year citation
1972	Awarded the Boston Globe Horn Book Award for Illustration for <i>Mr Gumpy's Outing</i>	1999	<i>Come away from the water, Shirley</i> receives the China Times and United Daily News Best Children's Book Award
1977	<i>Come away from the water, Shirley</i> receives the New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Books citation	2000	<i>Hushabye</i> receives the UK Nestle Smarties Book Prize
1980	<i>Would you rather...</i> receives the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis Award	2001	Contributed drawing to <i>For Every Child: The UN Convention on the rights of the Child in Words and Pictures</i> . Exhibited in "Tell me a Picture", an exhibition at the National Gallery, London selected by illustrator Quentin Blake
1984	<i>Granpa</i> receives the Kurt Maschler/Emil Award, UK	2002	Exhibited in "Magic Pencil", a British Council touring exhibition of children's illustrations selected by Quentin Blake
1985	<i>Granpa</i> receives the New York Times Best Illustrated Books Award		
1987	<i>John Patrick Norman Hennessy, the boy who was always late</i> receives the Parents' Choice Picture Book Award		



- 2004 A play based on *Cloudland* performed at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre, UK
- 2005 Exhibited at “In All Directions”, a touring exhibition of travel and illustration selected by Quentin Blake. Exhibited in the Sungkok Art Museum in a joint exhibition with Anthony Browne in Seoul, South Korea
- 2006 Exhibited in “My Picture Book Story” in the Sungkok Art Museum, Seoul, South Korea
- 2007-8 Exhibited in “The World of John Burningham’s Picture Book Artwork” in Osaka, Tokyo, Sapporo (Hokaido) and Nagano, Japan
- 2010 Exhibited in “Mr Gumpy and Other Outings: celebrating 50 years of John Burningham’s work” at Seven Stories, Newcastle, UK
- 2011 Exhibited at the London Transport Museum: “John Burningham, Journeys of the Imagination”  
  
Exhibited at the Fleming Collection: “John Burningham, An Illustrated Journey”

## Books for the Jury to Consider Five most important titles

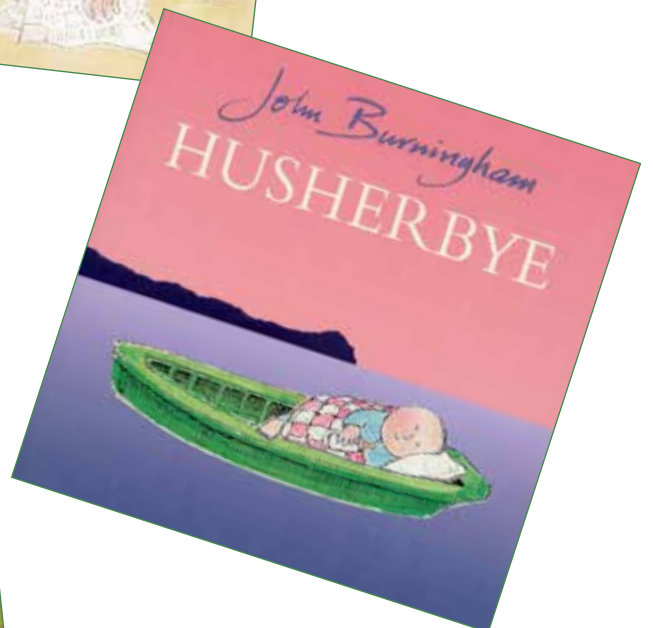
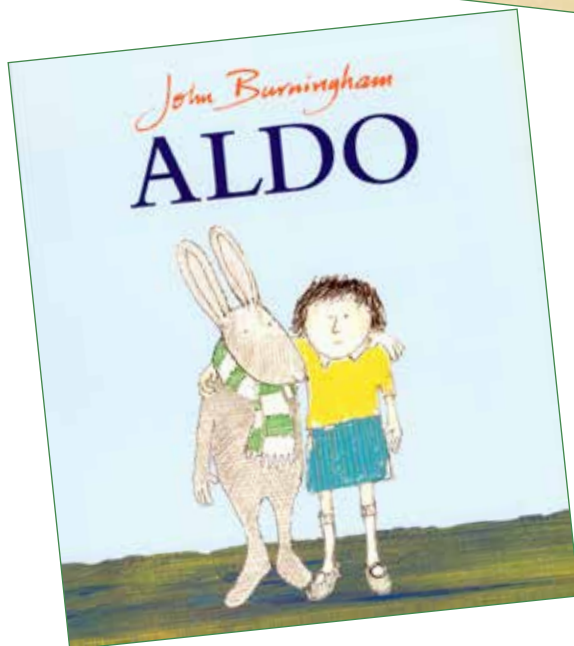
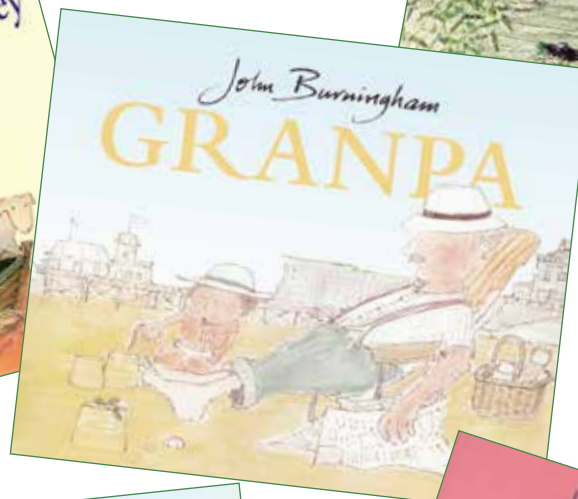
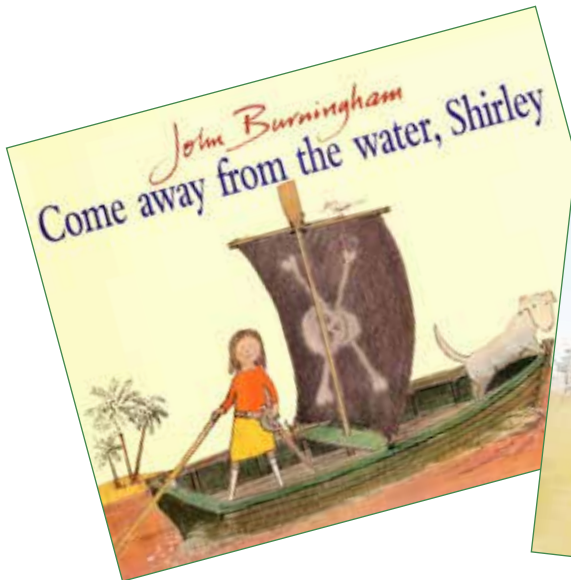
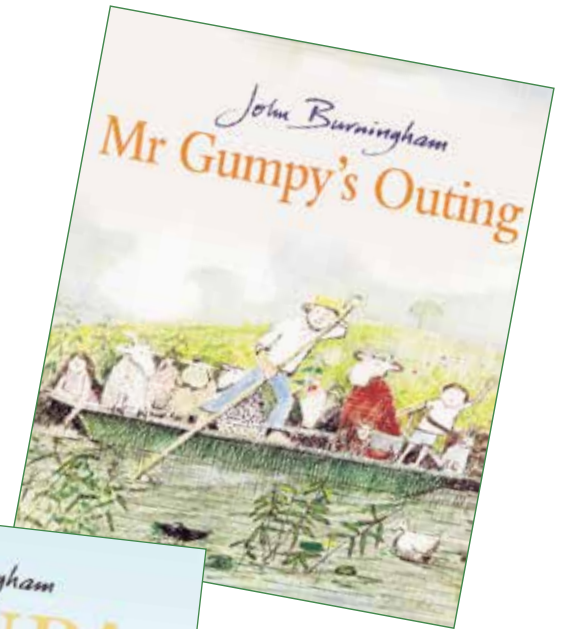
*Mr Gumpy's Outing.* London, Jonathan Cape, 1970

*Come away from the water, Shirley.* London, Jonathan Cape, 1977

*Granpa.* London, Jonathan Cape, 1984

*Aldo,* London, Jonathan Cape, 1991

*Hushabye,* London, Jonathan Cape, 2000



## Books for the Jury to Consider Five other important titles

*Borka, the Adventures of a Goose with no Feathers.*

London, Jonathan Cape, 1963

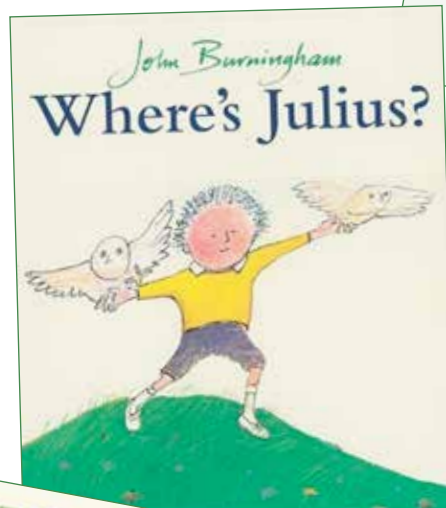
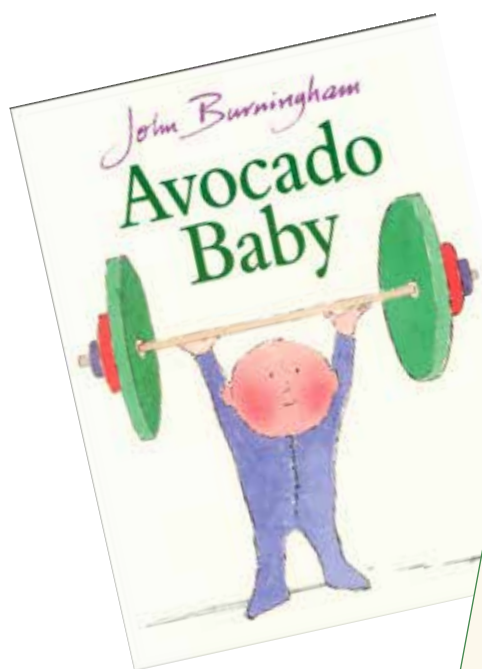
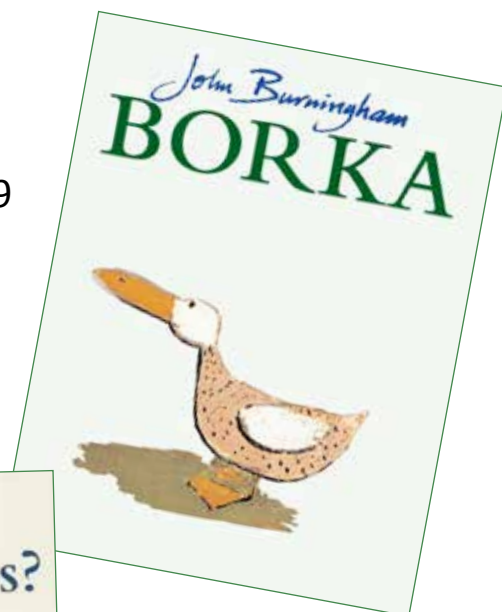
*Avocado Baby*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1982

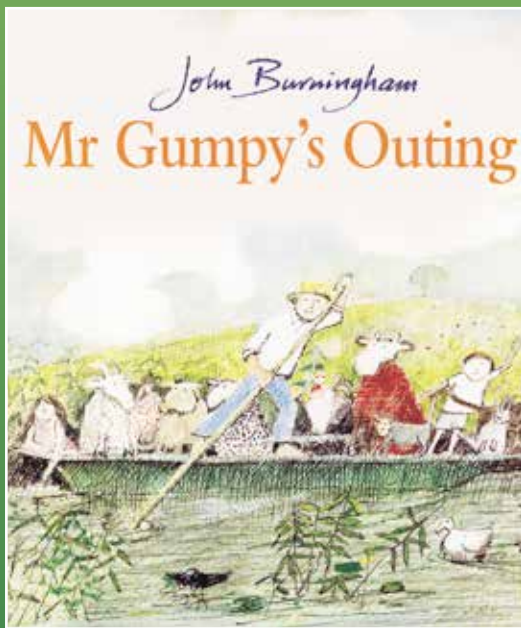
*Where's Julius*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1986

*Oi! Get off our Train*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1989

*It's A Secret*, London, Jonathan Cape, 2009

Also: *John Burningham: Behind the Scenes*,  
Jonathan Cape, 2009





Kate Greenaway Medal

Honorary Award from Biennale of Illustrations  
Bratislava

New York Times Best Illustrated Children's  
Books of the Year

Boston Globe Horn Book Award for  
Illustration

Outstanding Book citation from School Library  
Journal Children's Book Showcase selection

American Library Association (ALA) Notable  
Book citation

## First published 1971

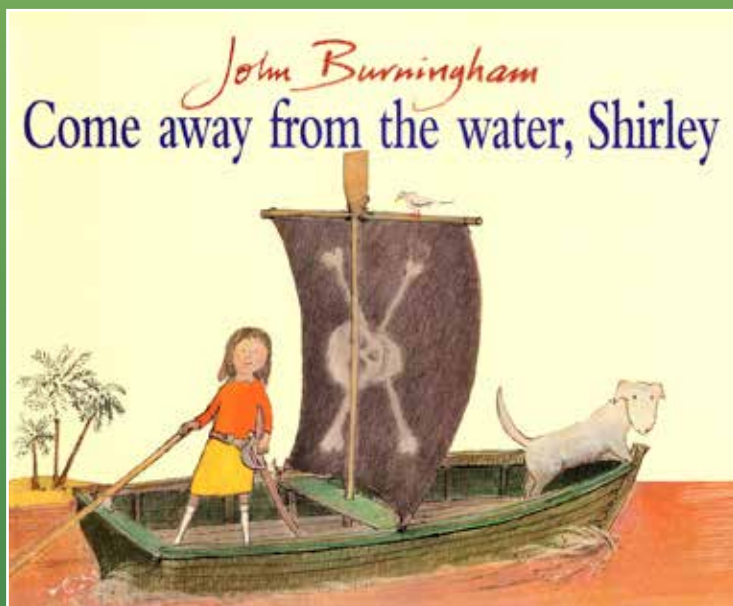
John Burningham was employing a well-loved formula when he composed *Mr Gumpy's Outing* in 1970. One by one children and animals pile into Mr G's boat, each in turn being commanded to behave... Of course they do not behave: 'The goat kicked, the calf trampled...' and the chain un-winds... 'and into the water they fell.' Such a simple climax, so perfectly judged, and then followed by the happy outcome when they all walk back across the sunlit fields for tea at Mr G's place. This is indeed a story for telling. But of course it's a story to look at too. There is an almost haphazard spontaneity about the illustrations, with little of the narrative detail that might have been given in a traditional picture book, and, indeed, one of the virtues of the drawing is the extreme sketchiness with which the characters are delineated. The varied music of these turning pages has its own purpose. For with the capsizing boat the rhythm changes. The upset is portrayed in a magnificent dynamic double-page colour illustration, which is balanced two pages later by the peaceable feast. Everybody scoffs tea and cake, too full for words, before the final, single-page, moonlit valediction. The exigencies of the 32-page picture book are perfectly exploited.

**Brian Alderson, *Classics in Short, Books for Keeps*, 2003**

The first page of *Mr Gumpy's Outing* has the distinction of being the subject of a brilliant piece of critical analysis by Perry Nodelman of how picture books represent the world, in which he concludes (in part): "Making ourselves and our children more conscious of the semiotics of the picture books through which we show them their world and themselves will allow us to give them the power to negotiate their own subjectivities – surely a more desirable goal than repressing them into conformity to our own views."

**Perry Nodelman, *Decoding the Images: Illustration and Picture Books*, in Peter Hunt (ed.), *Understanding Children's Literature*, Routledge, 1999**





Boston Globe Horn Book Honor list

New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Books of the Year citation

China Times and United Daily News Best Children's Book Award

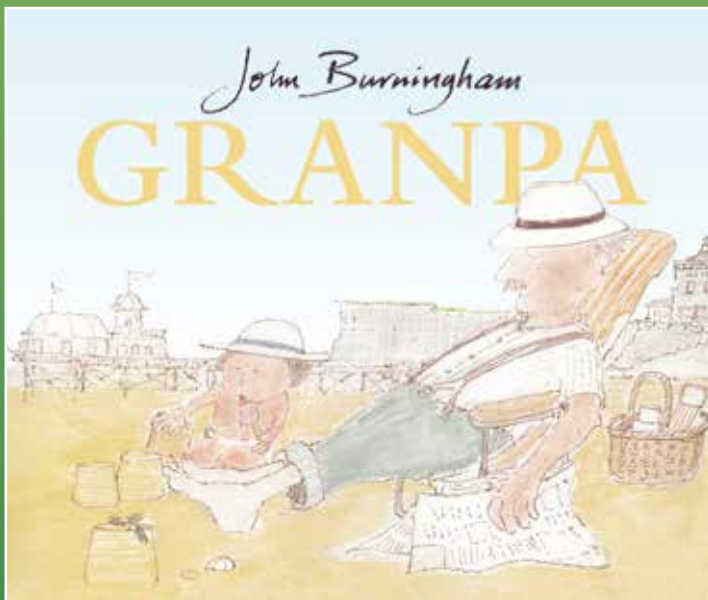
## First published 1977

A deceptively simple work of great interest both formally and stylistically and typical of the pared-down approach to picturebook making adopted by Burningham in the 1970s and 1980s...By using the central gutter of each double page spread to separate story worlds rather than pictures in sequence, Burningham is able to show the reader two distinct perspectives on events. Thus the verso has the parents sitting in deck chairs doing little more than making largely cautionary remarks to their daughter. The latter is visible only on the recto where, in a sequence of vividly coloured, wordless images, she appears to become caught up in an adventure aboard a pirate ship. By eschewing explanation and removing cues to interpretation, Burningham creates gaps in the text larger than is customary in picturebooks and thus gives the reader more work to do. Older children and adults tend to see Shirley as wrapped up in imaginative play or fantasy. Younger, less experienced - and less easily satisfied - readers are frequently intrigued by the lack of a clear relationship between the two sets of images and will try to puzzle out how they are connected.

**David Lewis, *Entry for Come Away from the Water Shirley* in Victor Watson ed., *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*, Cambridge University Press, 2001**

Children know how powerful the imagination can be at a young age and the contrast between Shirley's wild fantasies and the prosaic concerns of her parents will be one that they may have experienced themselves. They will also enjoy Burningham's over-the-top pirates, all so fierce and fearless until Shirley stands up to them, after which they tumble over in comic despair. Children who have already discussed their fantasies with others will surely love this book, those who have kept their imaginings a secret may enjoy a delicious sense of recognition.

**Nicholas Tucker, *Entry for Come Away from the Water, Shirley*, in Julia Eccleshare (ed.) *1001 Children's Books You Must Read Before You Grow Up*, Universe, 2009.**



New York Times Best Illustrated  
Children's Books of the Year  
citation

Kurt Maschler/Emil Award,

New York Times Best Illustrated  
Book Award

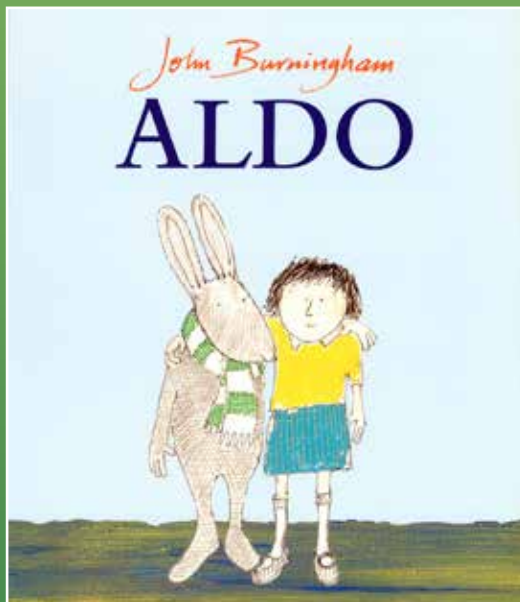
## First published 1984

Because of its lack of a clearly told story, *Granpa* has challenged many assumptions about how children read. Its design assumes an interactive view of reading which tolerates uncertainties and gives free rein to the child's readiness to question and speculate. In a famous page opening there is a sketch of the old man and the young girl with their backs to one another, their faces and body language eloquently suggesting anger and hurt: the only words are: "That was not a nice thing to say to Granpa." The text gives no indication of what she has said; it trusts its young readers to fill the gap from their own experience. This fragmentation of expected narrative patterns has been defended by Peter Hunt, who argues that 'its very complexity, together with the relinquishing of any authorial control in the verbal text makes *Granpa* closer to the comprehension patterns of an orally based reader than the vast majority of texts that set out to be "for children".'

**Victor Watson, Entry for *Granpa* in Victor Watson ed., *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*, Cambridge University Press, 2001**

On December 31st that year it happened that my own father was dying in Brighton General Hospital, aged 88, and my daughter Catherine who was then six came with me to visit him. She had had a very similar relationship as that described in the book, since she adored my father who was for ever telling stories and rhymes and jokes which made her laugh. The doctor told us that very sadly he could not last out the week and my daughter said to me: 'Will he go to heaven?' I said: 'I very much hope so' and Catherine with the sublime innocence of youth said: 'Can I come and watch?' This made me laugh despite myself and to see how as children we are able to accept all of life in a way that we find so difficult as adults.

**Howard Blake, who wrote the music for the animated film of *Granpa* (1986), which was awarded the Prix Jeunesse International.**



## First published 1991

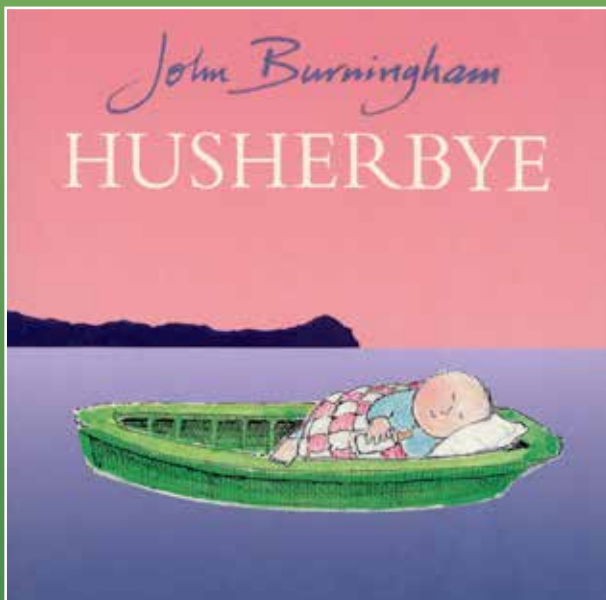
It is impossible to leave the subject of picture books without mentioning a superb new book, *Aldo* by John Burningham. Burningham is among the finest and most original writers and illustrators at work today. But the book is a curio, for, though there is only a line or two of print per page, if that, and Burningham's line-and-wash illustrations take center stage, it speaks so fiercely of loneliness and unhappiness that I am leery of recommending it to the usual picture-book gang. Aldo is the nameless narrator's Harvey-like imaginary friend, and saves her from the isolation imposed by her internal exile from the "they" who are horrible to her at school and from her distant, acrimonious parents. Both terror and joy are indicated in the arresting pictures.

*New York Times* 23 November 1992

This story is a challenge for Year 2, but a rewarding one. The text is a monologue, possibly an interior one, narrated by the girl. There is no linear story. The narrative structure is like a series of scenes which record the rough with the smooth; evocation of mood and feeling is paramount in the illustrations. At first, the pupils who shared *Aldo*, being familiar with the anthropomorphised animal

convention, saw the rabbit as a real presence. Gradually they noticed that Aldo never speaks and his silence made them think. Then: "Maybe it's because it's a secret he's there?" Although that hypothesis was a long time coming, a shift of approach followed; the story came to be viewed as a wish-fulfillment fantasy, and discussions began beyond the literal level. As the relationship between the words and images is highly ironic at times, the use of inference and deduction came into play. Looking at Aldo and the girl on the frozen lake at sunset, one pupil said: "Mummy wouldn't let her out on her own, and rabbits can't skate, so it has to be a dream." But a picture of Aldo and the girl on the tightrope stretched interpretative skills to the limit: did it represent the girl's idea of being extremely daring, or might it infer that having a secret friend could lead you into danger, or both?

Jane Doonan, an extract from an article in *Times Educational Supplement* 28 February 2003, describing the use of *Aldo* with a class of 6-7 year olds.



Nestle Smarties Book Prize

## First published 2000

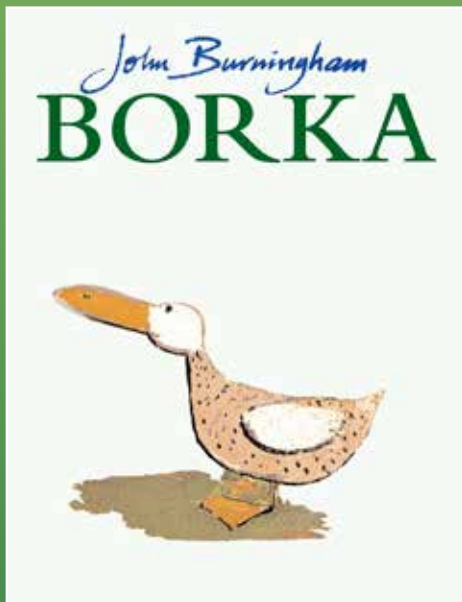
In Burningham's *Hushabye* additional narratives abound in the illustrations to his workpersonlike, quirky attempts at verse ('The baby's been sailing a boat on the sea,/and now needs to sleep./ HUSHERBYE'). An exhausted mother cat trudges through the snow with her sleepy kittens; three bears, grumpy with tiredness, climb the stairs; and the serene man in the moon is beginning to doze off. Sleep in this lullaby is sometimes a blissful state of consciousnessless ('The baby's asleep/in the boat that's afloat,/and is rocking on watery waves.') but more often a desperately needed sinking into oblivion after a difficult and strenuous day. The baby, tucked up in a blanket, bottle in hand, sleeps peacefully in her/his little green boat which floats serenely on a smooth pink sea but the exhausted goose sleeps flat out, slumped in a chair. Not all life, not all sleep then can be simple, easy and blissful, the watcher by the cradle appears to tell us. Just as the baby tumbles down when the bough breaks, so *Hushabye*, within its comforting, tender, sleep inducing words and pictures, does not, like all the best lullabies, altogether reassure.

Rosemary Stones, *Books for Keeps*, September 2000

This is Burningham in classic form with a bedtime tale that is so snug, gentle and warm, it makes you want to rush off to bed immediately. Once again, simplicity is the keynote here, both in the everyday magic of the text and the simple drawings. Burningham actually manages to capture exactly what a fish looks like when it is heavy-eyed with sleep or how comfy the man-in-the-moon is as he settles down for the night. This is a book that, in the tale of the baby sailing a boat on the sea, the cat looking for a place for her kittens to stay and the goose who has been flying high, takes the reader on a journey from sleepiness to sleep itself. A book to bring the day to a close with a caress and a whisper.

Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*, 2000





Kate Greenaway Medal

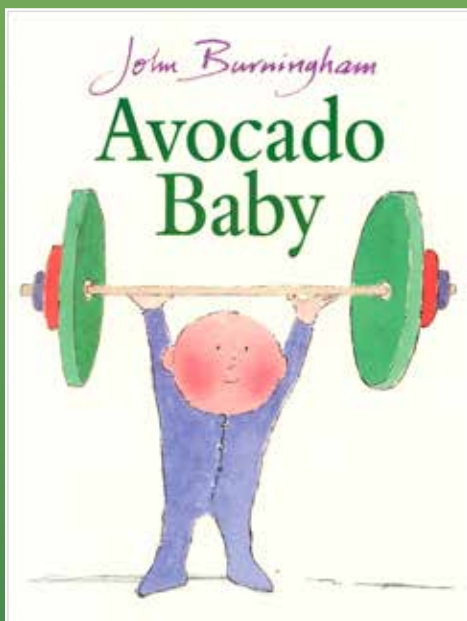
## First published 1963

Burningham's career as an illustrator took off when, as an unknown artist, his first book, *Borka*, was brought to the attention of Tom Maschler at Jonathan Cape. Maschler had just joined Cape as literary director. He had never published a children's picture book before, and neither had Cape, but Maschler's instinct told him that this was an exciting new talent, and somehow he persuaded his chairman that they should publish it. It was an immediate success, selling to eight foreign publishers and winning the coveted Kate Greenaway Award for the best picture book of the year. It was to be the first in a long line of distinguished titles published by Cape in this field.

Maschler's eye for a good picture book is now legendary (the next artist he signed up was Quentin Blake), so I asked him what he saw in *Borka* that gave him such confidence. "What I saw then was what I still look for in every picture book I publish. I want each book to be unique, completely different from anything else and above all, true to itself, true to the artist's vision." *Borka*, he says, had the additional draw that "it had the capacity to move the reader - and that's something you very seldom find."

What's exhilarating about this book is the uninhibited breadth, vigour and variety of the artwork: in addition to the very beautiful landscapes, there's the impact of bold, black, angular outlines, which give some of the pictures the look of stained-glass windows; there are spiky ink drawings that retain the immediacy of the artist's preparatory drawings, which are included in this anniversary edition. There's a loosely executed brush drawing on toned paper that gives a warm, domestic feeling to the cabin scene. And the robust lines of the chunky red boat gives the story a buoyant optimism.

Joanna Carey, *The Guardian*, 2003, from a retrospective survey of John Burningham's career, occasioned by the 40th anniversary publication of a new edition of *Borka*.



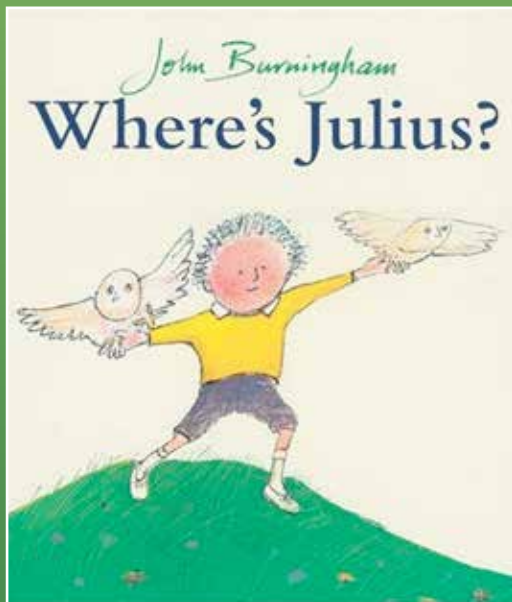
## First published 1982

There was a family that wasn't very strong and the mom was having a baby. They were expecting it to be stronger, but the baby wasn't very strong. The children decided to give him avocado pear. Every day the baby would eat avocado pear. He got stronger and stronger and stronger. One time at night, a burglar came. The baby woke up and picked up a broom and scared him away. Then the family put up a sign that said, "Beware of the Baby!" The baby was the strongest in the family. We like the book. It's funny because the baby is stronger than his mom and dad. Our favorite part is when the baby scared the burglar away. It's our favorite part because in the illustration, the baby takes a broom and scares him away. Our favorite character is the baby because he's very strong. We recommend this book to toddlers to third graders. We also recommend it to people that have babies in their family because it's a book about a baby that is stronger than his family. We think people will think this book is unusual and very funny.

**Reviewed by Aaron S. (age 6) and William L. (age 7) at [http://www.spaghettibookclub.org/review.php?review\\_id=1037](http://www.spaghettibookclub.org/review.php?review_id=1037)**

One page, where Mrs Hargraves is shown trying to feed the baby, is set out like a comic strip with a series of pictures. We see the baby angrily pushing the plate away, as well as Mrs Hargraves attempting to feed him in the bath and while he is standing up in his cot. She is at her wits' end and will try anything. This is a page with no text that could generate discussions about the various scenarios, considering the feeding problem from both the baby's and the mother's point of view. Favourite illustrations are likely to be the full-page one of the burglar dropping his swag bag when he sees the baby brandishing a broom behind him, or the double-page spread of the two bullies landing in the pond with an almighty splash that disturbs the poor ducks and a fish. The endpapers at both the front and back of the book show a double-page spread of an avocado plant covered with miniature babies in various colourful outfits. Some are perched on leaves while others appear to be performing gymnastics. This is a delightful illustration and again could be an inspiration for a conversation about what the babies are doing.

**Review from <http://www.curiousbookfans.co.uk/2010/children-books/1294/avocado-baby>**



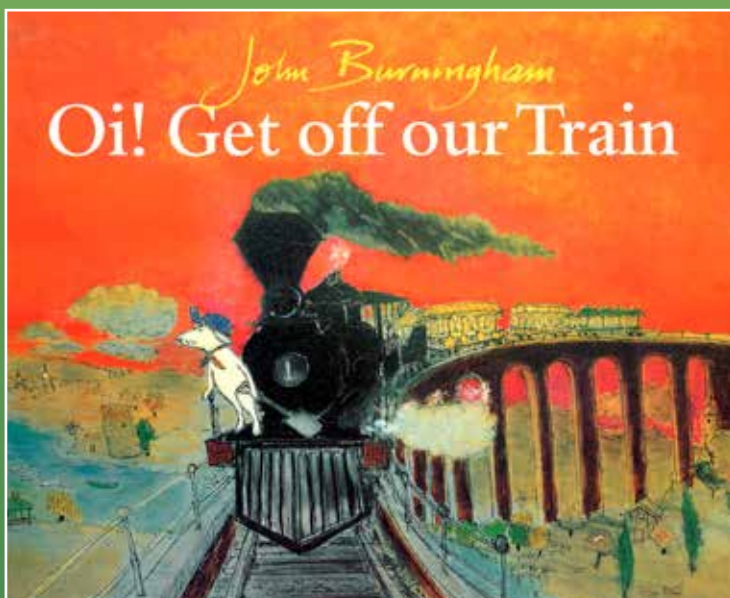
## First published 1986

With his unique brand of offbeat, understated humor and distinctive art style, Burningham again explores the child's world of imaginative play. After young Julius Troutbeck sets up a little home constructed out of three chairs, the old curtains and a broom in the living room, he doesn't come to lunch – he's too busy riding a camel across the desert. As the adventures become more exotic, his straight-faced parents carry bacon and eggs to the Pyramids and spaghetti to Peru. The turnaround humor of parents braving dangers to deliver meals will trigger envy from any child who would rather have food brought to the play area than come to the table. And the descriptions of food such as sardines on toast should produce groans and giggles from the story-hour crowd. The illustrations, rendered in pencil, crayon and watercolor, cleverly separate the real from the imaginary. Wordless, full-color spreads reveal Julius' escapades, while restrained use of color and line and a generous amount of white space depict his parents' kitchen preparations

**Kirkus Reviews November 15 1986**

*Where's Julius* exhibits a warm sympathy with, and empathy towards, the child's world. It invites the reader to fill gaps in the text, so becoming fully involved in recreating the story. It is necessary to 'read' the illustrations alongside the text to make sense of the events. Julius is immersed in a private fantasy world of pyramids, hippopotamuses and hungry Russian wolves. His understanding parents cleverly interject meal times by entering into his imaginary play. This is a classic picture book that can be used in the classroom, through student discussion, to develop speaking and listening skills; understand story structure; compare books in a similar style; identify authors and features of their style; and link with other expressive arts

**Extract from Betty and Cliff Moon, *Where's Julius*, *Child Education* January 1996, in a series on using classic picture books in the classroom.**



Parents' Choice Picture Book Award

Books Can Develop Empathy Award

## First published 1989

A little boy sets off on a round-the-world night train to dreamland with his pillow case dog for company. On route they are joined by all sorts of endangered animals asking to join the journey. Through fog, hot sun, wind, rain and snow they travel. Each time a new animal attempts to board we have the repetitive phrase "Oi! Get off our train!" followed by an explanation as to why that animal is endangered. "Please let me come with you on your train." says the tiger. "They are cutting down the forests where I live, and soon there will be none of us left." And so we are introduced to a range of habitats as well as a range of weathers; sea, marsh, forest and the "Frozen North". The illustrations are inimitable John Burningham, simple, humorous pencil outlines and delicate colour washes on one page with a much denser use of colour on the opposing page. The penultimate double page spread is a magnificently glowering, dark illustration of the train returning to an industrial town at night time – cleverly portraying the green message of the book, mankind is messing up the planet. There's a nice twist on the last page.

*Just Imagine website review*

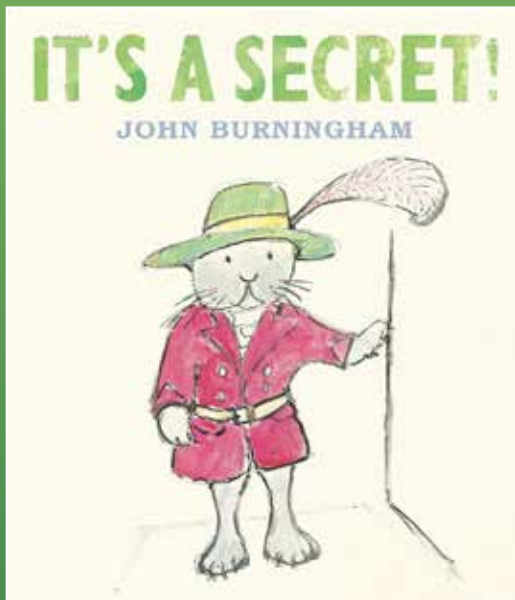
I was asked by the West Japan Railway Company to write a story for Expo 90, which had to include Japan's first steam locomotive. At the same time I was asked to design three full-sized railway carriages and two earthquake-proof station buildings [for a railway to run at the Expo]. My "Dream Express" ran at Expo 90 for 183 days without a hitch.

*Oi! Get Off our Train* was first published in Japan in 1989. It is an environmental tale, now dedicated to Chico Mendes, who did so much trying to protect the rainforests. He was murdered for his work.

*Oi! Get Off Our Train* is about endangered species, but more than that it's about the social hierarchy of young children and the need to ease themselves into a group.

*John Burningham*, in John Burningham, Jonathan Cape 2009





Boston Globe Horn Book Honour  
Award 2010

## First published 2009

I can't decide what I liked best about this book--perhaps the similarity to Esther Averill's *Jenny's Birthday Book*, with its late-night dancing moggies; or the fact that when the cat demands that Marie Elaine must get small to accompany him (how else to fit through the cat flap?) she does just that--gets small; or the sheer silliness of the cat queen, in her regal gown and tiara, checking her common wrist-watch at the end of the night. So many details combine in a sophisticated manner to tell a simple but satisfying story of one magical night. The mixed media illustrations bear the hallmark of Burningham's distinctive style – rough and sketchy, but ever fresh on the page. And the slightly oversized format provides an expanded backdrop for the unfolding events, so that the reader is not cheated out of the full impact of the late-night escapade.

**Review by Kara Schaff Dean at** <http://notjustforkids.blogspot.co.uk/2009/06/rave-review-its-secret-by-john.html>

All the necessary elements are there in this delightful fantasy: adventure, midnight festivities, and feline royalty. This author is well known for his ability to take children on fantasy journeys. The book's illustrations have been achieved by a variety of mediums. Ink sketches of the characters are filled by simple crosshatching, water color, or crayon. Burningham's characters may have the look of being quickly sketched, but he has said that they have been well rehearsed before the final execution. He knows them well and thus is able to use minimal lines to achieve maximum effect. In *It's a Secret!*, he has created dramatic skies, thick with color and interesting texture, behind a simple cityscape. As the dawn's light begins to overtake the darkness of night, we see the artist's use of color to great effect. The text is minimal, simple, and full of charm. My favorite line comes at the end of the book when Marie Elaine's mother, finding her stretched out on the living room couch the next morning says, "You look as if you were out all night with the cat." Marie Elaine answers truthfully but doesn't divulge any details ... and neither will I. It's a secret!

**Review by Phoebe Vreeland, December 10 2010, at** <http://www.thechildrensbookreview.com/weblog/2010/12/review-its-a-secret-by-john-burningham.html>

# John Burningham Bibliography

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*Seasons*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1969

*Mr Gumpy's Outing*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1970

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*The Rabbit, The School, The Snow, The Baby, The Blanket, The Cupboard, The Dog, The Friend*. (Little Books series), London, Walker, 1974-75

*Come away from the water, Shirley*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1977

*Time to get out of the bath, Shirley*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1978 *Would You Rather*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1978

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*Avocado Baby*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1982

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*Slam Bang!, Cluck Baa, Jangle Twang*. (First Words series) London, Walker, 1985 *Where's Julius*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1986

*John Patrick Norman McHennessy, the boy who was always late*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1987

*Alphabet Book, Colours, 123, Opposites, Letters, Numbers*. (Play and Learn series) London, Walker, 1987

*Oi! Get off our Train*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1989

*Aldo*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1991

*Harvey Slumfenberger's Christmas Present*. London, Walker, 1993

*Courtney*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1994

*Letters, Numbers, Colours, Opposites*. (First Steps series) London, Walker, 1994

*Cloudland*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1996

*Whadayamean*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1999

*Hushherbye*. London, Jonathan Cape, 2000

*The Magic Bed*. London, Jonathan Cape, 2003

*Edwardo, the Horriblest Boy in the Whole Wide World*. London, Jonathan Cape, 2006

*It's a Secret*. London, Walker, 2009

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*France*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1998

*The Time of Your Life*. London, Bloomsbury, 2002

*When We Were Young*. London, Bloomsbury, 2004

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## John Burningham Translations

### Books for Children

**Borka.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1963  
(Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian)

**Trubloff the Mouse who wanted to play the Balalaika.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1965  
(French, Japanese, Korean)

**Humbert, Mr Firkin, and the Lord Mayor of London.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1965 (Japanese)

**Cannonball Simp.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1966  
(Japanese, Korean)

**Harlequin the Fox who went down to the Valley.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1967  
(French, Japanese, Korean)

**Seasons.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1969 (French, Japanese, Korean, Spanish)

**Mr Gumpy's Outing.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1970  
(Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai)

**Mr Gumpy's Motor Car.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1973 (Chinese, French, Japanese, Korean)

**The Rabbit, The School, The Snow, The Baby, The Blanket, The Cupboard, The Dog, The Friend.** (Little Books series), London, Walker Books, 1974-75  
(French, Japanese, Korean)

**Time to get out of the bath, Shirley.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1978  
(French, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese/Brazil)

**Would you rather.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1978  
(Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish)

**The Shopping Basket.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1980  
(French, Japanese, Korean)

**Avocado Baby.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1982  
(French, Japanese, Korean)

**Grandpa.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1984  
(Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Welsh)

**John Patrick Norman McHennessy, the boy who was always late.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1987  
(Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean)

**Oi! Get off our Train.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1989  
(Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Swedish)

**Aldo.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1991  
(Afrikaans, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese)

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(Chinese, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Portuguese, Swedish)

**Courtney.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1994  
(Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Korean)

**Letters** (Japanese, Korean), **Numbers** (Japanese, Korean), **Colours** (Catalan, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish), **Opposites** (French, Japanese, Korean). (First Steps Series) London, Walker, 1994

**Cloudland.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1996  
(Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Korean)

**Whadayamean.** London, Jonathan Cape, 1999  
(Chinese, German, Korean, Swedish)

**Husherbye.** London, Jonathan Cape, 2000 (Danish, Japanese, Korean)

**The Magic Bed.** London, Jonathan Cape, 2003  
(Chinese, Danish, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Swedish)

**Edwardo, the Horriblest Boy in the Whole Wide World.** London, Jonathan Cape, 2006  
(Chinese, French, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Galician)

**It's a Secret.** London, Walker, 2009  
(Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean)

**There's Going to be a Baby** (with Helen Oxenbury) London, Walker, 2010 (Brazilian, Catalan, Chinese, Danish, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish)

