

PUBL7032: Children's & YA Publishing
Assignment 1: Podcast Audio Podcast, Script, and Web Copy

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PODCAST EPISODE TITLE

Four things you need to know about children's non-fiction publishing

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In this podcast episode, Publishing Studies MA student Stacey McDevitt explores four key areas of children's non-fiction publishing relevant to today, reporting on the thriving UK and USA markets and delving into trends in children's non-fiction, formats, diversity and inclusion, and new highly anticipated non-fiction imprints to look out for such as Hardie Grant's Bright Light and Macmillan's Neon Squid Books.

SCRIPT

Hello and welcome, it's Sunday 17 October 2021, and this is Stacey. I'm a master's student at Oxford Brookes University on the Publishing Studies programme and your podcast host for this episode. If you're listening to this, then I'm guessing you have an interest in the world of publishing and books too, and I'm here today to share four things you need to know about non-fiction publishing for children.

First let's talk about the children's book **market** in the UK, which has had a really good year, increasing by more than 11% for both volume sales and value in 2021 according to the Bookseller's Charts and Data Editor, Kiera O'Brien (Eyre, 2021).

What has contributed to this boost according to O'Brien? Children's picture books, a huge 61% increase in YA sales, and non-fiction for children. This comes after Nielson (Neil sin) Media Manager, Philip Stone's report in 2020 that children's non-fiction sales would exceed the record £51million set in 2019 (Books & Publishing, 2020).

Both have pointed to school closures during lockdown and the need for home learning text as a main driver for this increase, however that doesn't mean we should ignore the transformation that children's non-fiction has undergone in recent years.

Giorgia Grilli, a lecturer on Children's Literature at the University of Bologna argues that over the last decade, one of the most interesting events in international children's publishing has been the production of more and more non-fiction picture books (Grilli, 2021), which brings me to point two out of four – **children's non-fiction formats.**

In Chris Kloet's 2021 article for Writers & Artists she talks of the fundamental and striking changes in the type of non-fiction books that are now published for young readers (Kloet, 2021).

A notable and thriving format to look at is narrative non-fiction picture book biographies like *Rosa Parks: Little People, Big Dreams* by Lisbeth Kaiser or *Great Women Who Changed The World* by Kate Pankhurst. Graphic comic book style non-fiction such as *Black Heroes of the Wild West* by James Otis Smith or *Human Body Theatre* by Maris Wicks is another interesting trend too. According to Brightly, which is the online resource that recommends children's books to parents in partnership with Penguin Random House (Brightly, 2021), librarians are seeing a place for graphic non-fiction as a way to build readers struggling to engage with other books (McNeill, 2014).

The increase in choice and quality for children's non-fiction now is interesting to compare to how adults might view the genre based on their own childhood. In January 2021, non-fiction authors Cynthia Levison, Melissa Stewart, and Jennifer Swanson featured on Publishers Weekly making the argument to adults that kids do really like non-fiction but might have their access hindered because of parent's misconception that all non-fiction for children is the like the dreaded textbook they remember - text heavy with little to no illustrations (Levison, Stewart & Swanson, 2021).

Thankfully, as Gill argues in her article about the 'new' non-fiction, formats and content has evolved over the past two decades to become something that authors and illustrators are now carefully crafting with the aim to excite, inspire, inform, and engage young readers, helped by an emphasis on the visual elements to introduce key concepts alongside an engaging writing style (Gill, n.d.)

We've also seen cultural trends influence children's non-fiction, which leads me to point three out of four – **diversity, inclusion, and the big conversations.**

Today's non-fiction for children is moving towards a more inclusive market and isn't scared to address the big issues or tough topics to help start conversations with children. According to BookBrunch (2018), there was a 54% increase on the number of books sold in the children's and YA non-fiction market in 2019 about inspirational women, with the *Fantastically Great Women* books by Kate Pankhurst, already mentioned earlier in this episode, leading the way.

This year, two key players announced new non-fiction imprints for children to look out for too – Australian publishing house Hardie Grant recently launched its UK-based children's non-fiction imprint Bright Light which focuses on gender, the environment, first nations, bodies, character, and diversity (Bayley, 2021).

In the announcement found on The Bookseller's website, Kate Brown, Commercial Director at Hardie Grant explained that the imprint was conceived as a response to cultural and social movements such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, global unrest during the pandemic and forest fires and flooding like the world has never seen before. This really illustrates the responsibility and power that non-fiction for children has to educate the adults of tomorrow.

To date, the list has already published picture books such as *How to be a Real Man* by Scott Stuart and *All Bodies are Good Bodies* by Charlotte Barkla, with the 2022 list exploring topics such as body image, consent, and the environment.

Likewise, Macmillan has launched its London-based imprint Neon Squid Books dedicated to non-fiction books that make complex topics more accessible to children (Lodge, 2021). The imprint will publish titles in the US and UK at the same time and will initially include *Tales of Ancient Worlds: Adventures in Archology* and *The Book of Sisters*, which will be a collection of biographies about notable sisters throughout history such as Native American siblings and ballerinas Maria and Marjorie Tallchief and tennis champions Venus and Serena Williams.

In the announcement on the Publishers Weekly website, high-quality design and production are said to be the top priorities for Neon Squid, with the imprint believing that no topic is too tricky for kids when it has engaging narratives and quality illustrations.

But what is happening outside of the UK? We still have time to explore an **international perspective** of children's non-fiction publishing, which brings me to my fourth point. It's not just the UK seeing an increase in sales, and across the pond over in the United States of America, a similar transformation can be seen in the market.

Reported by Publishing Perspectives in August 2021, Kristen McLean, the Executive Director at NPD Books and Entertainment described 2020 as ‘a historic year’ for children’s non-fiction print sales with a 23% increase from 2019 (Anderson, 2021).

Like the UK market, McLean credits the need to educate and entertain children at home during the pandemic as a key driver, however Kate Hale, Senior Editor at National Geographic Kids Books has also argued during the American Book Producers Association conference (Burnett, 2018) that the adoption of the Common Core Standards, which heavily encourages teachers to introduce more non-fiction into the classroom (McNeill, 2015), alongside a shift from the school market landscape to mass market has contributed to the success of children’s non-fiction.

That’s all from me today. If you’re interested in reading more about anything mentioned in this episode, there’s a reference list included with the episode summary. Thanks for listening!

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