

It's not always about books

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Rob Sanderson and Jo Bowers review a variety of magazines that are available for readers from 4-11 and offer some ideas of ways in which teachers can use them in the classroom. Younger readers have also reviewed some of the magazines featured.

Recent research shows that a significant number of boys and girls number comics and magazines amongst their favoured reading material (Clark, Osborn & Akerman 2008; Swain 2009). There is an argument, then, that this type of reading material should be included in the classroom repertoire, not only so that the classroom reflects the readers' interests but also to develop a critical response to reading comics and magazines in a multimodal age with an ever-changing range of new kinds of texts.

There are now various magazines developed especially for primary age children – an excellent option for children who prefer non-fiction over fiction or who might find reading a full book a daunting prospect. With magazines, the reader is encouraged to dip in and out of articles, try out quizzes and puzzles, solve problems, ask and answer questions, read short stories, all of which require different skills, knowledge and understanding.

In this article we explore some magazines and newspapers available for young readers, and test some of them out on the intended audience. The table below offers a rough guide to the age of the magazines' target audience and the kind of subjects covered. We also include the costs for each:

Magazine	Age Range	Subject area(s)	Cost
<i>Aquila</i>	8-12 year olds	Cross-curricular	12 issues for £45
Bayward Magazine: <i>Story Box</i>	3 years and over	Cross-curricular	10 issues for £40
Bayward Magazine: <i>Adventure Box</i>	7-9 year olds	Cross-curricular	10 issues for £40
Bayward Magazine: <i>Discovery Box</i>	9-11 year olds	Cross-curricular	10 issues for £40
<i>First News</i>	7-14 year olds	Cross-curricular	£13.99 quarterly
<i>The Loop</i>	7-11 year olds	Cross-curricular	£18 quarterly
<i>Circa</i>	8-11 year olds	Maths	3 issues for £12 yearly
<i>Buzz</i>	5-8 year olds	Maths	3 issues for £8.50 yearly

Aquila

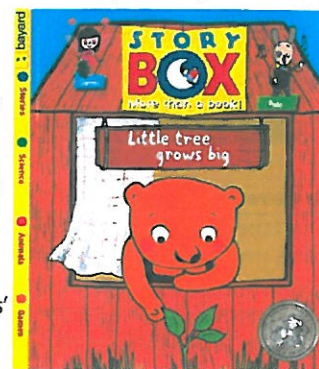
This magazine for readers aged 8-12 years old, has a full colour page layout design that is similar to some current non-fiction books. The magazine favours non-fiction although occasionally there are stories. Topics vary; in the October 2012 edition there is a large article on earthquakes and volcanoes, also featured on the front cover, pieces on wheelchair basketball, the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 and an interesting practical feature showing how to make a lava lamp. Don't worry, no electricians are needed!

Written in an accessible style, *Aquila* offers something for everyone. The tone is lively and never patronising and the pages are packed with information: 'Did you know?' panels, maps, photographs and illustrations with different page layout for each feature. The magazine focuses on English, Maths and Science subjects, and encourages questioning, making it suitable to enhance classroom learning or encourage curious minds to seek out more about subjects of interest.

Molly (aged 7) liked lots of sections of the issue of the magazine on the theme of Canada: 'I love the cover, it looks interesting' and reading it 'helped me to know things about Canada'. The quiz page was a 'just pick it up and do it' page, which she also liked. Overall the non-fiction parts of the magazine were Molly's favourites as the story looked a bit too long and the colours didn't attract her.

Story Box

StoryBox is a quite glossy, full colour read aloud magazine to share with 3-6 year olds that looks almost like a picture book. High quality illustrations are supported by accessible, age-appropriate language. Regular features include: facts about animals; 'Bella and Buster' provide answers to science based questions such as 'Where does the rain come from?'; a monthly poem from Judith Nicholls; a comic strip following the adventures of the Lovett family; and a 'fun and games' section. There is a strong focus on literacy and story



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in the magazine but it also covers other learning areas for young children such as understanding of the world and mathematical development.

Our young reviewer Alexandra Watkins (aged 6) thought the story was good and she recommends the magazine to anyone who likes adventure. Commenting on one of the stories, she says:

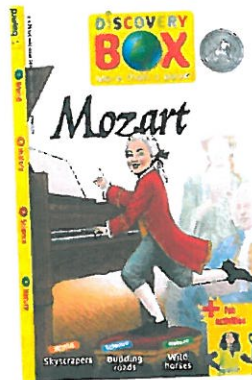
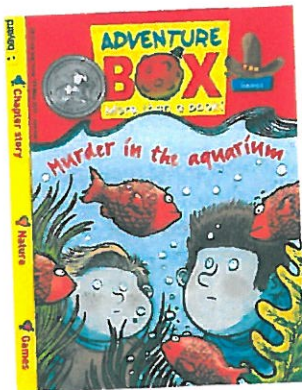
'and it's like magic because they both shrink like little tiny mouses.'

Adventure Box

Adventure Box, a small pocket-sized magazine in full colour, is aimed at lower key stage 2 children. In a similar pattern to *Story Box* (it's produced by the same company), the title of the edition is the title of the story inside the magazine. Regular features include: a chapter story (44 pages in length); facts and information about the natural world; 'fun and games' including word searches, puzzles and matching games plus a comic strip following the adventures of Tom and Lili, notable for using joined-up print in the speech bubbles.

The issue we reviewed is based on the chapter story, *Queen of Egypt in Danger!* that takes up roughly two thirds of the book. There are two further much shorter stories in comic strip format, one of which, again as in *Story Box*, features an international writer and illustrator. For non-fiction, the 'Nature Box' feature gives facts about hazelnuts. There is a jokes page with a request to send in more jokes and activity pages where 'Inspector Pixel Investigates'. Again, there is a strong story element, whilst reasoning skills are developed through the games and activities.

Dylan (aged 7), our young reviewer, said: 'It is a really good magazine because it has stories and lots of fun activities to do.' He particularly liked Inspector Pixel Investigates 'because you get to colour in, have some fun and solve a mystery.' If he had this magazine again he 'would do the investigation first because it is really fun.'



Discovery Box

From the same stable as *Story Box* and *Adventure Box* this has a similar layout, but is aimed at readers aged 9 years and over. Regular features include: an historical event being retold as a picture story; information about animals; scientific topics with instructions for simple experiments;

and a feature looking at how other people around the world live. The reading – and learning – experience is further enhanced by quizzes, fun facts, games, recipes and things to make and do.

In the issue reviewed here, Mozart's life story provides the basis for the picture story and the cover illustration, focusing on him as a child star, with fact boxes giving details of his life and some of his amazing achievements. An interesting and informative illustrated article on building roads is well-laid out with clear, contemporary style illustrations including a cut-away of a tunnel boring machine (that's a TBM) and a bird's eye view of a cable-stayed bridge being constructed.

The graphic novel format is used to explore blood circulation, bringing a strong science focus, and there is a fascinating look at some of the world's tallest skyscrapers, showing them in comparison to each other. London's Shard at 305m tall looks positively tiny next to the 828 metre tall Burj Khalifa in Dubai!

There's more comic strip fun courtesy of 'Krogg and Alienna' and an interesting DIY section with simple science based experiments and a very tasty looking lemon cake recipe as well as sections on nature, science and the world.

First News

This weekly full colour newspaper in tabloid format is designed for readers aged between 7 and 14 years. The stories are short, easy to read and illustrated by large, clear photographs.



Advertising is kept to a minimum, and there is a heavy focus on puzzles, competitions and reviews. For older readers this may seem lightweight, but it would work well for reluctant readers and is a good introduction to the world of newspapers. Running to 24 pages, it is a manageable read, and the news stories are accessible and punchy. At times, it feels a little low on facts, or a little too localised, but there is a good variety of news articles from across the UK.

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