



Seven Stories: a collection to treasure

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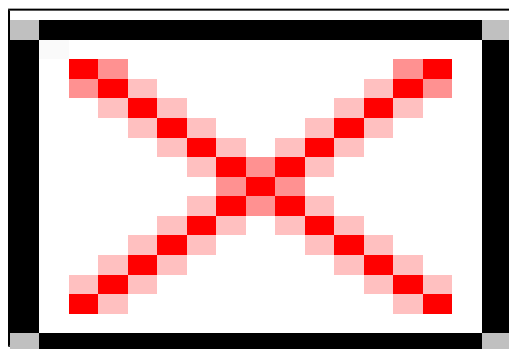
[Kristopher Mckie](#) [1]

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Byline:

A guided tour by **Kristopher Mckie**, Collection Manager

Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books is home to one of the largest specialist children's literature collections in the world. Established in 1996 the museum holds named collections of artwork and manuscripts by around 140 leading authors and illustrators, and smaller amounts of work by more than 100 others, plus around 35,000 books. The **Books for Keeps** archive has now been added to that collection, as Collection Manager **Kris Mckie** explains.



The **Seven Stories** collection extends from c. 1930 to the present day – a period not covered by any other major institution in the country and includes work by Joan Aiken, Edward Ardizzone, Peter Dickinson, Harold Jones, Jan Mark, Philip Pullman, Michael Rosen and Ursula Moray Williams, Enid Blyton, Judith Kerr, Michael Morpurgo, John Agard, David Almond, Barbara Firth, Beverley Naidoo, Grace Nichols, Nick Sharratt and Noel Streatfeild, among many others.

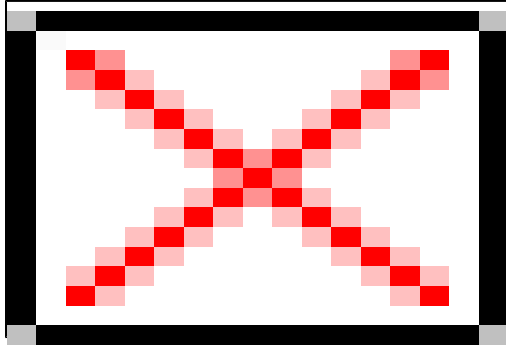
While each writer's collection is different in its size and content, each gives a unique glimpse into its creator's work and inspirations and the peculiarities of each individual's approach to writing.

The **Seven Stories** Collection explores all stages of the making of the book, from the earliest drafts and ideas right through to the finished publications, updated editions and merchandise. **Seven Stories** collect all that goes into the making of a book including sketches, preliminary drawings, dummy books; notes, drafts and re-drafts; editorial papers, correspondence and reviews.

One of the most recent acquisitions is a collection of papers relating to the running of **Books for Keeps** donated by founders **Richard and Angie Hill**. The collection gives a fascinating insight into the magazine's almost 40 year history as well as a glimpse into the changing children's book industry.

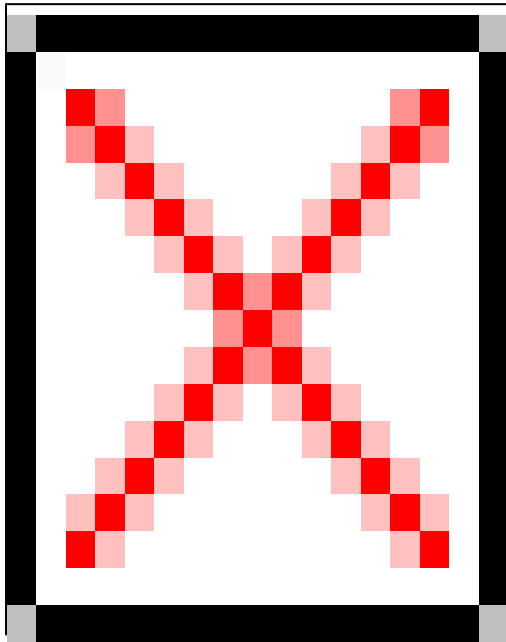
Collections like the **Books for Keeps** archive give a unique insight into the rich history of publishing for children in Britain. As well as collecting the papers of key authors and illustrators, **Seven Stories** has actively acquired more and more papers that tell the wider story of children's publishing, that can help us understand how publishing trends and

reading habits have changed over the years.



With each new acquisition the **Seven Stories Collection** becomes broader and more multi-layered - telling not just one story of children's books in modern Britain but many. The **Seven Stories** collection now not only documents the history of publishing for children but gives a unique insight into the very nature of children's culture and childhood in Britain - charting the changing ideas on what subjects our children should and shouldn't be exposed to, the shifting opinions on whose lives and experiences children's books should represent, and the impact that wider society and politics has had on childhood experience.

Seven Stories uses its unique collection in all sorts of ways. Since 1996 the museum has curated no fewer than 30



exhibitions, showing thousands of original artworks and manuscripts, drawn increasingly from the Collection itself. Exhibitions have travelled to nearly 50 museums and galleries all over the UK, from Canterbury to Kilmarnock, reaching nearly 2 million people and making Seven Stories one of the most active touring museums in the country.

Archive discovery opportunities have inspired thousands of children and young people to write, draw, talk, read and perform.

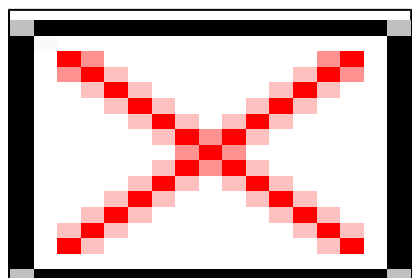
The first **online catalogues** were launched in 2005 and the Seven Stories database now includes nearly 16,000 records and is accessible worldwide.

Seven Stories has hosted hundreds of **researchers**, both individuals and groups, exploring topics ranging from school stories to radical activism in picturebooks and from fairy tales in children's theatre to the evolution of merchandising.

With partners at **Newcastle University's Children's Literature Unit** Seven Stories has also developed dozens of research collaborations; the latest joint project is to map research pathways through the recently acquired archives of literary agent Laura Cecil and the writer and editor/critic partnership Aidan and Nancy Chambers. Both of these collections contain valuable material that will be used to explore challenging new histories of children's books. The period covered by these collections was one of radical change in attitudes towards writing for children and these collections will help us understand and interpret this for our audiences.

The team at **Seven Stories** work hard to look after the Collection and keep it safe for future generations. **Seven Stories** conservator, Rosalind Bos, ensures that all our books and archives are housed in the correct conditions and carries out repairs when needed. She has recently been working on some fascinating artwork by Pearl Binder (1904-1990) which was donated by the artist's family in 2016.

From 2014-18 **Seven Stories** was supported through the **Heritage Lottery Fund's Collecting Cultures** programme to acquire important new collections of artwork, poetry and young fiction. The funding enabled the museum to purchase work which would not otherwise have been available. It also supported the often substantial costs associated with taking in donations and helped to make newly acquired work available to the public.



The most recent exhibition to be launched at **Seven Stories**, **'Where Your Wings**

Were?' celebrates the work of North East author and patron of **Seven Stories**, David Almond. David's archive was one of the largest acquisitions made with Collecting Cultures funding, with additional support from the Friends of the National Libraries.

As part of the museum's bold vision for the future, **Seven Stories** wants to continue building the Collection, acquiring more exceptional work by authors and illustrators past and present, and enabling as many people as possible to be inspired by it.

How you can help

Every year over 175,000 people join in and enjoy the **Seven Stories Collection** in galleries, through our touring exhibition programme and online.

Our creative learning and engagement programme involves 30,000 children, young people and teachers each year. Donations help ensure that everyone has the opportunity to learn about and respond to the stories represented our collection.

Your donations allow the expert team at Seven Stories to care for and restore works in the national collection for the enjoyment of visitors now and in the future.

As a registered charity, Seven Stories relies on generous donations from individuals, companies, trusts and foundations to support our work. If you would like to help to save, celebrate and save Britain's wonderful heritage of children's literature, please get in touch.

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Kristopher Mckie is Collection Manager at **Seven Stories**.

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Links:

- [1] <http://imap.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/kristopher-mckie>
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