

## Review Journal, *Science Books & Films*, Approaches Milestone

The more things change, the more they stay the same. That seems particularly true for the AAAS review journal *Science Books & Films* (SB&F) as it enters its 20th year.

Launched by the AAAS as a quarterly review in 1964, *Science Books* (the journal's original title) quickly became an important source for concise, authoritative evaluations of books in all the sciences and mathematics for all ages, kindergarten through professional. Reviews written by scientists and science educators assessed the accuracy and appropriateness of classroom and supplemental materials then being published to enhance science and mathematics education after the shock of Sputnik. Hundreds of AAAS members generously volunteered to be reviewers.

Today, amid renewed national concern about the quality of science and mathematics education, SB&F is still quietly performing its old role, but with new relevance. Now published five times per year by a staff of three in the Meetings and Publications Center, SB&F carries a total of some 1500 reviews a year, many written by AAAS members, some of whom have been with the magazine for 20 years. The "Children's Books" section continues to be

filled with reviews of supplemental science reading for the young—important in light of today's concerns over students' lack of interest and achievement in the sciences. SB&F's "Adult Books" section carries reviews of science and mathematics books of more general interest to older students, teachers, parents, and other adults.

"We've never stopped trying to keep our readers aware of the best and the worst science materials," says editor Kathleen Johnston, but during a spate of budget cuts in the late 1970's, "we lost some of the subscribers who need us the most. That's when public junior and senior high school subscriptions took a dive. Now, however, we're beginning to see renewed interest in the magazine by those subscribers," Johnston says. "They're beginning to come back, possibly because some states and localities are using portions of their federal block grant money for science materials acquisitions."

Public, academic, and school librarians are and will continue to be "our most loyal subscribers," Johnston notes.

"Children's librarians love us," she claims. "They know that children are curious about 'facts,' and if they're getting those facts in a well-done science

book, they may also be finding the stimulus to logical thinking. If the book is extremely well done, they may even begin to discover the thrill felt by scientists who are pursuing answers to fundamental questions."

From its librarian subscribers, SB&F also gets kudos for its rating system. "Many librarians who subscribe don't have science backgrounds, so they appreciate the expertise of our reviewers. By the same token, they like the fact that we have a 'not recommended' (NR) rating. If our reviewers find the material contains serious errors of fact or has serious deficiencies in the way its information is developed, then a 'NR' is in order," says Johnston.

The magazine has initiated a number of changes over the years. In keeping with increased interest in audiovisual materials for classroom, SB&F added film reviews in the early 1970's and later added videocassette and filmstrip reviews. These additions are so popular that assistant editor James Angelo plans to start a calendar of tips of interest to educational film users in the upcoming September issue.

Other new features have been tried, and still more are in the works. The March 1984 issue carried a 2½-page annotated bibliography of nearly 10 years of SB&F reviews of books and films on nuclear weapons, strategies, and the effects of nuclear war. The May 1984 issue—SB&F's largest ever in page count and advertising—contained a special 30-page section devoted to reviews of computer books and films, mostly instructional. The reviews, written by computer experts, experienced personal computer users, and scientists, teachers, and librarians, were designed to help readers separate the best from the rest of the computer materials available.

To celebrate its 20th anniversary, SB&F again plans a special project, the evaluation of the middle and high school level biology textbooks, to be published in the May 1985 issue. The journal has not reviewed textbooks at this level for many years, "mostly because textbook selection has been such a 'closed shop' in so many states," Johnston says. "Now, however, given the growing recognition that our children haven't necessarily been well served by that policy, we here at SB&F have decided to get involved in textbook review again."

KATHRYN WOLFF, *Publications*

### **SB&F**

*Science Books & Films* is the only English-language, serial publication devoted exclusively to critical reviews of science, technology, and mathematics books, filmstrips, and films and videotapes. It currently reviews the material produced by some 500 publishers and distributors for students at all levels—kindergarten through lower division college—and for teachers, librarians, and other adults.

The journal was established in 1964 as *Science Books: A Quarterly Review* (SBQ) and continued the Association's interest in science education that had earlier been expressed in the AAAS Traveling Science Libraries (1955–1962) and in numerous annotated book lists. SBQ became SB&F in 1975 when reviews of audiovisual materials were added, and in 1980, the journal was expanded to five issues a year.

A yearly subscription to SB&F costs \$20, with a 10 percent discount for AAAS members.—K.W.