



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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***“To the corporation, a Clifford key ring is no different from a Clifford book. Each is a ‘container’ for the idea of ‘Clifford.’ Each ‘container’ is simply a means for a child to experience ‘Cliffordness.’ In this world there is no difference between a book and a video or a CD or a T-shirt or a backpack.”***

-Daniel Hade, “Story-selling,” from *Horn Book Magazine*

“Storyselling,” quoted above, is a thought-provoking look at the merchandising of children’s books. In his article, Hade talks about his childhood love of the *Curious George* books. “Back then,” he says, “I had to satiate my Curious George desires by checking the books out of the library and reading the stories over and over again.” On the other hand, he points out, today’s child can wake up to a Curious George alarm clock, after sleeping on Curious George sheets and using a Curious George comforter. He describes the toys, lunch box, backpack, cookie jar, doll, kite, movie and costume he could also own – and concludes by pointing out all of these items and more are available online.

I couldn’t resist going to Amazon.com myself and conducting a search for Harry Potter merchandise. Probably because I have no young children at home, I have been basically untouched by the extensive marketing of this name – and so I

was quite impressed by the amazing array of items available in all sorts of categories, like: home & garden (210 items); outdoor living (22); apparel (38); computer & video games (63); and kitchen & housewares (26). We’ve come a long way since I mail ordered my Lone Ranger ring and silver bullet.

This merchandising is apparently critical for the ongoing sales of many children’s books. Reaching across all aspects of a child’s life, it is no longer about the book, but about a “brand” – like Curious George or Madeline.

According to Hade, there are eight corporations that dominate children’s book publishing in the United States – and these eight produced more than 84% of the books reviewed in the *Horn Book Magazine* in 2000. This can be compared to 34.4% of the reviews in 1967 – again, from the top eight children’s book publishers. These corporations are driven by the desire to make a much larger

profit than the publishers of old – when a 4% profit margin was considered acceptable. The current margin of 12 to 15% puts pressure on up-and-coming authors to produce a book that can be successfully marketed in a variety of ways.

A piece on the website of the D.C. radio station 103.5 F.M. ([stage.wgms.com](http://stage.wgms.com)), called "Rowling Transforms Kid Lit and Embodies Brit Grit" talks about the effects of this kind of pressure on the authors of children's books. Barry Cunningham, the Bloomsbury editor who took a chance on Rowling, points out that the kind of money involved now in the publishing of children's literature gives people "a shorter window of opportunity to succeed before the next thing comes along to push them off the shelves."

Another article from the *New York Metro* called "Licenses R Us," by Michael Wolff, gives a fascinating, if somewhat dep-

ressing, view of licensing and children's books. As Wolff says: "Books are just part of the story (and not the story itself)."

After reading these articles, I am beginning to understand the power of the marketplace when it comes to the success of a children's book. And I found myself imagining the adult equivalent of these products. For instance, there could be a Da Vinci Code briefcase, with a picture of Mona Lisa on the front. Or, for mystery lovers, Temperance Brennan bed-sheets, decorated with scalpels, based on the Kathy Reichs series about a forensic anthropologist. Or...well, you get the idea.