

PENGUIN  
BOOKS

JAMES WALTON  
**THE  
PENGUIN  
BOOK QUIZ**  
FROM THE VERY HUNGRY  
CATERPILLAR TO ULYSSES

'It's so much fun'  
Emma Healey



'An absolute delight'  
John Preston

PENGUIN BOOKS

## *The Penguin Book Quiz*

Praise for *The Penguin Book Quiz*:

'It's so much fun. The perfect level for keen but not necessarily expert readers. Specific enough to make you reach back into your memory and occasionally kick yourself at not finding the answer, but not so specialized that you want to give up . . . I'll definitely be buying copies of this book as gifts' Emma Healey, author of *Elizabeth is Missing*

'Quite possibly the greatest social lubricant since the invention of alcohol. An absolute delight' John Preston, author of *A Very English Scandal*

'Few quiz questions make you smile, laugh or gasp. James Walton's always do. *The Penguin Book Quiz* is unceasingly enormous fun' Alan Connor, author of *The Joy of Quiz*

'Detailed, entertaining and wonderfully informative, a must-have for quiz aficionados and bibliophiles alike' K. M. Ashman, author of *The Blood of Kings* trilogy

Praise for *Sonnets, Bonnets and Bennetts*:

'The perfect gift for the sort of person (like me) who shouts the answers at *University Challenge*' Lynne Truss, author of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*

'Fiendish, funny and endlessly surprising, James Walton has provided the perfect volume for anyone who loves books, relishes a quiz or just fancies showing off at a dinner party' Mark Billingham, author of the Tom Thorne novels

'How nice it would be if the family would sit around the Boxing Day fireside considering the questions in affable competition' *Daily Telegraph*

'A must for those who think they know their literature . . . includes the unexpected, alongside the more serious' *Independent*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Walton has written and hosted seventeen series of BBC Radio 4's books quiz *The Write Stuff*. He also writes questions for BBC2's *Only Connect* and contributes a weekly quiz to the *FT Weekend* magazine. He is the books editor of *Reader's Digest* and reviews books for the *Spectator*, *The Times*, *Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph* and *The New York Review of Books*. His previous books are *The Faber Book of Smoking* and *Sonnets, Bonnets and Bennets: A Literary Quiz Book*.

# *The Penguin Book Quiz*

*From The Very Hungry  
Caterpillar to Ulysses*

JAMES WALTON



PENGUIN BOOKS

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To Helen, Sam and Beth,  
with much love



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BIRDS AND BEES:  
A HISTORY OF PENGUIN  
AND QUIZZING

It seems only right to start a quiz book with a quiz question. So here goes – what became part of British life first, Penguin books or quizzing?

The answer, perhaps unexpectedly, is Penguin books, which first appeared in 1935 and took off immediately. Not until three years later did Britain get its first quiz – when, just after 8.30 p.m. on 19 April 1938, the BBC's Regional Programme Northern broadcast *General Knowledge Bee*, 'a contest across the Pennines' between schoolchildren from Lancashire and Yorkshire.<sup>1</sup>

And 'broadcast' is a significant verb here, because, as Alan Connor makes clear in his highly recommended *The Joy of Quiz* (published, as luck would have it, by Penguin), the quiz as we know it today came into being only with the rise of radio. The Victorians famously loved their parlour games, many featuring surprising levels of

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I Incidentally, the word 'quiz' was *not* coined by a bloke in eighteenth-century Dublin who bet his friends he could popularise an entirely new word and so wrote 'Quiz' on walls all over the city. The story is an early and impressively long-lasting example of an urban myth.

physical contact and low-level violence.<sup>2</sup> Yet it never seems to have occurred to them that there was fun to be had by simply asking each other, say, ‘Who was the first British Prime Minister to have a beard?’<sup>3</sup> or ‘What connects HMS *Bounty* with the English cricket team that toured Australia in 1882–3?’<sup>4</sup>

Admittedly, as Connor also makes clear, the quiz as we know it today did have its precursors. As long ago as 1691, John Dunton, a London bookseller, launched the *Athenian Gazette*, which had the neat idea of asking people to send in questions. The result was like a ‘Queries’ column in today’s newspapers, except with a team of experts – aka Dunton and his coffee-house mates – supplying the answers instead of other readers. (Not that all their answers would necessarily have passed a modern fact-checking test. Q: ‘How came Monkeys first into the World?’ A: ‘As Man did, by the Power of God.’) Plainly, this wasn’t anything resembling a contemporary quiz. Nonetheless, it did help to establish the concept that discrete bits of information – particularly when set up by questions – could be a source of enjoyment in and of themselves.

This same principle underlay the journal *Notes and Queries*, founded in 1849, which also invited its readers to ask the experts – although in this case the experts were

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2 In the disturbingly named ‘Squeak, Piggy, Squeak’ someone wearing a blindfold placed a pillow on the knee of one of the other players, sat on it, invited them to squeak and tried to work out who they were. ‘Are You There, Moriarty?’ featured two players, again blindfolded, whacking each other on the head with rolled-up newspapers.

3 Benjamin Disraeli.

4 They were both captained by a man named Bligh.

more expert, and the questions more scholarly. In 1884 the principle was even attached to the word 'quiz' when an American called Albert Plympton Southwick published the pithily titled *Quizzism and Its Key Quirks and Quibbles from Queer Quarters: A Melange of Questions in Literature, Science, History, Biography, Mythology, Philology, Geography, Etc., with Their Answers*. But this and a couple of other proto-quiz books that followed in the early twentieth century were still intended to be read rather than to be played for mildly (or not so mildly) competitive entertainment. They also failed to ignite any sort of quizzing craze.

Or, as it would have been back then, any sort of beeing craze – because when radio programmers decided in the 1930s that asking people stuff would make for a good listen, 'bee' was the preferred term. With an obvious debt to America, Britain's first radio bees tested their contestants' spelling.<sup>5</sup> Before long, though, they began to branch out. Many moved on to more specialised areas, like the Regional Programme Western's *Agricultural Bee*. ('Tonight, on the principle of the Spelling Bee, teams of young farmers from Somerset and Dorset will compete in answering . . . questions on everyday agricultural topics.') But then that historic cross-Pennines face-off of 19 April introduced the idea of questions on any subject at all – making 1938, in Alan Connor's ringing phrase, 'the year when British quiz began'.

By which time there were plenty of Penguin books for the contestants to consult – and not just the sixpenny novels that quickly made the company's name. The Penguin

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5 Spelling bees had been around in America since the early nineteenth century, and the first national competition took place in 1925.

Shakespeare was launched in April 1937. A month later came the Pelican non-fiction series, which established its high-mindedness straightaway by kicking off with *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism* by George Bernard Shaw.

The traditional story – or creation myth – of how Penguin came about takes place at Exeter Station when the company's founder Allen Lane was returning from a weekend spent with Agatha Christie<sup>6</sup> and her husband. Depressed by the feebleness of what was on offer at the station bookstall, he resolved there and then to create a range of intelligent, well-designed paperbacks that would cost no more than a packet of ten cigarettes.

Like most myths, this one is a matter of some debate. For a start, there are other versions, including the suspiciously Newtonian one that inspiration struck while Lane was sitting under an apple tree. More prosaically, he may just have been taking up the suggestion made by an office junior that keen readers like him would love to be able to buy decent paperbacks for sixpence. Yet what is certain (if a little less exciting) is that there was plenty of office admin involved – because, like quizzing, Penguin didn't come out of nowhere.

Allen Lane Williams was born in Bristol in 1902, the son of a surveyor at Bristol Corporation. By his own admission he 'wasn't very bright at school', but luckily he had a relative on his mother's side called John Lane who ran the

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6 Christie later became godmother to one of the three daughters Lane had with his wife Lettice, whom he married in 1941 – in a ceremony where the guard of honour was provided by two lines of cardboard penguins.

publishing firm The Bodley Head. When Allen was sixteen, Uncle John<sup>7</sup> invited him to join the company, on the rather odd condition that he and the rest of his family drop the surname Williams and revert to his mother's maiden name of Lane.

In the 1890s The Bodley Head had been closely connected to the decadence movement, gaining such a racy reputation that *Punch* magazine joked, 'uncleanliness is next to Bodliness'. One of the big names it published, for example, was Oscar Wilde – although the experience wasn't terribly happy. Wilde annoyed Uncle John by seducing one of the office boys. He also regarded his publishers as little more than servants – and to prove it, gave the name Lane to the manservant in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

After Wilde's arrest and imprisonment, the company decided to head in a more respectable direction – and by the time Lane joined in 1919 it was among London's leading publishers. To his later pride, Lane started as an office boy himself, before working his way up to the sales department, where he forged links with booksellers that would one day come in extremely handy. (In the early 1950s the recently knighted Lane looked back on the days when he had 'traipsed the city streets trying to sell a few books' and wondered if 'that wasn't about the happiest period of my business life'.)

From there, with Uncle John increasingly seeing him as the heir apparent, his rise through the ranks accelerated. He was appointed a director in 1924, and when John

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7 As he was known – presumably on the grounds that the more accurate Second Cousin Twice Removed John doesn't really roll off the tongue.

died the following year, he continued to enjoy the support of John's widow Annie, now the majority shareholder.

Which, it soon turned out, was just as well. In 1926 Lane agreed to publish *The Whispering Gallery*, a book the journalist Hesketh Pearson claimed to have ghostwritten from the shockingly outspoken memoirs of a senior diplomat. Unfortunately, on the day it came out the *Daily Mail* denounced the book as 'a scandalous fake'.<sup>8</sup> Even more unfortunately, the *Daily Mail* was right: Pearson had fabricated the entire thing. The book was withdrawn, but when The Bodley Head – or 'The Badly Had' as it was nicknamed – sued Pearson, it somehow managed to lose, leaving him free to sue the company back for the 'pain and suffering' he'd been caused.

Three weeks after the second trial, Annie died, leaving Lane the majority shareholder. He immediately brought in his brothers John and Dick, and also took the decision – one that he'd develop much further in his future career – to buy in books from other publishers and bring them out in cheaper editions, which at this point meant hardbacks for three shillings and sixpence. Realising that his fellow directors still regarded him with some suspicion, Lane even agreed to publish some of the more controversial Bodley Head titles, including James Joyce's *Ulysses*, at his own expense.

But by now – whether as a result of a dodgy railway bookstall, an apple tree or a smart underling – the idea of Penguin was beginning to take shape. With the rise of radio and cinema, the British book trade felt (not for the first or last time) under attack from new technology and

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8 The *Observer* went with the comparatively mild 'a reeking compost of garbage'.

at a 1934 conference, attended by 48 publishers and booksellers, Lane announced that sixpenny paperbacks would be his own answer to the challenge. 'Forty-seven of [the delegates] went away on the Monday morning with no further thought on the subject,' the bookseller Basil Blackwell later wrote. 'The 48th was Allen Lane.'

Lane's motives, as he said himself, were 'both missionary and mercenary'. On the one hand, he wanted to make a stand against the notion that 'the majority of people are stupid, interested only in entertainment that enables them to escape from their environment'. On the other – and precisely because this notion was so misguided – he believed that 'for several years the book trade has been sitting on a gold mine and not known it . . . People want good books, and they are willing, even anxious, to *buy* them if they are presented in a straightforward, intelligent manner at a cheap price.'

Despite another strangely persistent myth, Allen Lane didn't invent paperbacks. In fact, they'd been around since the early sixteenth century. What he did do was publish them with unusual care – unusual, but by no means unique. An obvious and acknowledged influence on Penguin was Albatross Books, founded in Hamburg in 1932, which not only produced thoughtfully designed literary works as mass-market paperbacks but also colour-coded its titles according to genre, the way Penguin would later do.

And as one of Lane's executives admitted, Penguin's avian name may have 'subconsciously hatched from an Albatross egg' too. The hatching took place when, at a meeting to discuss what the new imprint should be called, someone who wasn't officially there made a world-changing suggestion. Overhearing the discussion, Joan Coles, a secretary, paused from typing on the other side of a partition

to say, ‘What about Penguins?’ Lane approved at once of the name’s ‘dignified flippancy’ and sent his designer Edward Young off to London Zoo to sketch a few of the real things as part of what he described as ‘the first serious attempt at introducing “branded goods” to the book trade’.

So it was that on 30 July 1935 the first ten Penguin books appeared in covers featuring a flightless bird and those soon-to-be-familiar horizontal stripes: orange for fiction, blue for non-fiction, green for crime.<sup>9</sup> Now all Lane had to do was sell them . . .

For a while, it looked as if this might be a problem serious enough to scupper the whole plan. Lane had printed 20,000 copies of each title and needed to sell between 17,000 and 18,000 merely to break even. Many booksellers refused to take any, including – disastrously – W. H. Smith. ‘It’s a flop,’ Lane told a friend. ‘I’ve got to pack it up.’ But then, three weeks before publication, he called on Clifford Prescott, Woolworth’s head buyer for books (and haberdashery). Prescott wasn’t keen either – until his wife showed up for a lunch date and told him how good she thought the books were. A couple of days later Woolworth’s ordered 63,500, influencing other shops to take them too, and with that Penguin was made. It went on to sell a million books in its first four months and three million in its first year – by which time it had been incorporated as a company of its own, independent of The Bodley Head.<sup>10</sup>

When it struck out on its own, Penguin was initially

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9 Nowadays orange is also used for quiz books.

10 These days, in a full-circle kind of way, The Bodley Head is part of Penguin Random House, where it specialises in serious non-fiction.

based in Great Portland Street in Central London, with its warehouse in the mouse-infested crypt of Holy Trinity Church, Marylebone, where the toilet facilities consisted of a single tin bucket. By 1937 the company was doing well enough to build its own office-warehouse combo on a cabbage field in Harmondsworth, Middlesex, bought from a farmer for a little over £2,000 – plus £200 for the cabbages.

Lane's faith in the public's intelligence was further vindicated when Pelican was launched and made bestsellers out of works on economics, psychiatry, art and ancient history. The lofty aim was to bring what Lane called 'the finest products of modern thought and art to the people' – and, according to the *Spectator* in 1938, Pelicans became 'a fact of enormous importance in the struggle to overcome economic restrictions to knowledge'. As war approached, Lane expanded his company's non-fiction into more topical books, known as Penguin Specials, which were published at a speed that modern publishers might find hard to believe, let alone match. At the time of the 1938 Munich Crisis, Shiela Grant Duff's *Europe and the Czechs* was in the shops less than a week after she delivered the typescript.

Once the conflict started, other publishers soon had another reason to resent Penguin's huge pre-war success. Paper rationing was based on how much paper each publisher had used between August 1938 and August 1939 – and because Penguin had been so productive that year it now had a lot more of the stuff than its rivals. Over the next six years, Penguin published more than 600 books, among them such bestsellers as *Aircraft Recognition* and *Keeping Poultry and Rabbits on Scraps*. With many male staff away at war themselves, much of the work was done by Eunice

Frost, one of Britain's first women editors. Frost had joined Penguin as Lane's secretary in 1937, but shortly afterwards he asked her, 'How do you like reading?', pushed a pile of books across the desk and gave her an editorial role.

The war years also saw an enormous surge in reading more generally, with civilians using books to get them through the boredom of the blackouts and people in the military needing to kill time on long journeys and in barracks. However, in a possible foreshadowing of the company's problems in the 1950s, Penguin's Forces Book Club (FBC) was one of its rare early failures. The soldiers to whom the specially selected titles were sent would, it transpired, have preferred Westerns to the well-intentioned likes of *Growing Up in New Guinea* by Margaret Mead – and many FBC Penguins ended up doing their bit for troop morale as fuel and toilet paper.

Even so, Penguin entered the post-war world on a confident high: not surprisingly given that it was a world the company had done much to create. Once victory seemed likely, its non-fiction books were at the centre of the debate as to what sort of Britain should emerge from the conflict, and on the whole they argued for precisely the kind of welfare state that the Labour government built. Penguin now took its place alongside the BBC and the NHS as one of the benign virtual-monopolies that dominated British life: 'not so much a publisher as an estate of the realm,' as the writer and all-round man of letters John Gross later put it. Its stock rose higher still with the introduction of Penguin Classics – in those days translated works only – which turned Homer, Cervantes and Dante into three of Britain's bestselling authors.

To polish his brand even further, Lane took advice

on where to find the best book designer in Europe. He was given the name of Jan Tschichold, who as a young man in Germany had been arrested by the Nazis for the unusual offence of criminal typography.<sup>11</sup> By 1947 Tschichold was living in Switzerland and once Lane brought him to Penguin, he overhauled and professionalised every aspect of production to make the books both more elegant and more uniform. He also slimmed down the penguin of the logo.

Meanwhile back in the world of bees (remember them?), quizzes had had a pretty good war too. They'd continued as a radio staple, but had also diversified into the type of live events that today's pub quizzers would surely recognise – even if they mightn't have welcomed the questions set by Women's Institutes and Mothers' Unions on road safety and farming. And yet, as it turned out, both quizzes and Penguin had a tricky decade ahead, and for fundamentally the same reason . . .

The 1950s are not often seen as a flashy decade, but the growth of consumerism meant that both Penguin and the BBC were faced with new, brasher, American-influenced competitors, who transformed paperback publishing and the British quiz.

For Penguin, those competitors were the likes of Pan, Corgi and Fontana, with their vulgar picture covers and their even more vulgar sales figures. ('Breastsellers' was Lane's usual description of their books.) Suddenly, Penguin's understatedly stylish designs began to seem a bit old-fashioned, causing the company to experiment rather

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II Apparently his fondness for slanted lettering made his work 'Bolshevik'.

half-heartedly with picture covers of its own. The results, as Jeremy Lewis puts it in his highly recommended *Penguin Special: The Life and Times of Allen Lane* (published, as luck would have it, by Penguin), ‘ended up by pleasing no one, being too tasteful for the vulgarians and too radical for the old guard’.

For the BBC, the brasher competitor was, of course, ITV, which started in 1955 and – like those new paperback publishers – wasn’t afraid to give the punters what they wanted, rather than what they should want. (For the BBC’s first director-general Lord Reith, the ideal was giving the public something ‘slightly better than it now thinks it likes’.) And what the punters wanted, it seemed, was not just quizzes but big-money quizzes. True, successful competitors in the BBC’s *Have a Go* radio show could bag themselves £1 18s 6d. But in the week it launched, ITV brought the nation *Double Your Money*, presented by Hughie Green, which offered a top prize of £1,000.

Naturally, not everybody approved of the blizzard of similar ‘give-away’ programmes that ITV was soon serving up. The cultural critic Richard Hoggart – who also acted as an unpaid adviser to Penguin – stated regally, ‘We don’t like the quiz shows. They pander to the need for quick money.’ The trouble was that, as with Pan, Corgi and Fontana, the public appeared to like them quite a lot.

In the late 1950s, American TV’s big-money quiz shows found themselves engulfed in scandal when it emerged that they were giving their favoured competitors the answers in advance. Not only that, but the producers also supplied acting instructions. ‘I was told,’ remembered a contestant on the show *Dotto*, ‘how to bite my lips, clench my fists and look agonized as I supposedly struggled to find the

answers. They even told me how, at the last moment, to make my face light up as if the answer had suddenly come to me.' The whistle was finally blown by Herb Stempel, a Bronx Jew, who'd been ordered to lose to Charles Van Doren, a university professor from an impeccably WASP family. Stempel's breaking point came when he was instructed to answer 'Which motion picture won the Academy Award in 1955?' with 'On the Waterfront' – when, as he well knew, the real answer was *Marty*, set in the Bronx and one of his favourite films.

While there was no suggestion that British shows were doing the same thing – although some did supply helpful reading lists – the American scandals meant they now faced increasing scrutiny from the sort of Hoggartians who'd despised them all along. In 1960 the UK government set up the Pilkington Committee on the future of broadcasting. Its report, published two years later, took a particularly dim view of big-money quizzes, with their 'appeal to greed and fear'. It also recommended that 'the maximum value of prizes should be greatly reduced'.

Three months later, in an obvious attempt to demonstrate that it was moving quizzes upmarket, ITV introduced *University Challenge* – 'a quiz,' in the words of presenter Bamber Gascoigne, 'that the public wouldn't know the answers to'. Even so, by the late 1960s the show was pulling in ten million viewers a week, meaning that Bill Wright, the new head of the BBC's Outside Broadcast Quiz Unit, was keen to hit back with a brainy quiz of his own. His eureka moment came when he decided to draw on his experience of being interrogated by the Gestapo during the war – and the result was *Mastermind*. Instead of demanding name, rank and number, presenter Magnus Magnusson asked for name, occupation and specialised

subject, but the voice of the interrogator still came out of darkness to someone sitting in a brightly lit chair.

As for the sort of quizzes the Pilkington Report had attacked, the prize money wasn't reduced – but nor was it allowed to rise too much. For the next 30 years, £6,000 was the maximum amount that anybody could win on UK television, as the British TV quiz entered what Alan Connor calls 'a three-decade holding pattern'.

For Penguin, the 1960s began more promisingly, when it published the unexpurgated version of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, was prosecuted for obscenity at the Old Bailey and won.

The prosecution was led by Mervyn Griffith-Jones QC, who possibly supplied too much information when he explained beforehand: 'I put my feet up on the desk and start reading. If I get an erection, we prosecute.' His most famous – and ill-advised – moment in the trial itself was when he asked the jury if *Lady Chatterley* was a book you would 'wish your wife or servants to read'. For its part, the defence called several eminent figures to testify to the novel's literary worth, including Richard Hoggart and the Bishop of Woolwich, who caused a press sensation with his claim that every Christian should read it. Sadly, Enid Blyton turned down Penguin's invitation to testify too. Understandably astonished to be asked, she replied that she'd never read the novel and 'my husband said NO at once'.

After Penguin was acquitted, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* duly became its bestselling book ever, with the paperback bearing a dedication 'to the twelve jurors'. The following year, Penguin was floated as a public company that, awash with *Chatterley* cash, proved predictably attractive to investors

and Lane became a millionaire. But the challenges posed by those rival publishers hadn't gone away – and the question of how much Penguin should change its trusty methods would prove increasingly divisive as the decade went on.

In 1966 Lane acknowledged, 'I find myself out of sympathy with much of contemporary literature, theatre, typography and art.' Nonetheless, he did allow Penguin covers to be redesigned in keeping with the general 1960s trend towards more colour and glossiness. E. V. Rieu, who'd edited Penguin Classics since they began, was aghast at the colour reproductions of paintings that now adorned his books. ('Oh my poor series, of which I used to be so proud,' he lamented.) Anthony Powell was so affronted that he went off to Fontana.

But as the debate/ructions between the old guard and the company's handful of young turks continued, Penguin did have one unalloyed triumph throughout the 1960s. When it started in 1940, the Puffin imprint for children consisted of non-fiction picture books, with titles like *The Wonders of Sea Life* and, less alluringly, *The Story of Furniture*. The first batch of fiction – led by Barbara Euphan Todd's *Worzel Gummidge* – came in 1941, and over the next 20 years Puffin's hits included E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and Norman Hunter's *Professor Branestawm* series (to mention just three that won't give away any answers to the quiz questions in this book).

The creator of Puffin, and the person responsible for all these successes, was Eleanor Graham – which makes it a bit unfair that the name that's always associated with the imprint is Kaye Webb. Still, there's no denying that, after taking over in 1961, Webb's achievements were

staggeringly impressive. Making the most of a boom in children's books, for which she was, of course, partly responsible, Webb increased the number of Puffin books from 150 to around 800 by the end of the decade. In 1967 she founded the fondly remembered Puffin Club, which had 44,000 members within two years.

Puffin also came to the rescue in the 1970s when Penguin's adult publishing was in something of a crisis. Books that it would once have snapped up were now coming out from the newly established paperback divisions of their original publishers. Meanwhile, the death of Allen Lane in 1970 was perhaps the literary equivalent of Alex Ferguson's retirement as Manchester United's manager – when a man who'd been so dominant for so long proved not just a hard act to follow but, very probably, an impossible one.

Happily, the 1980s saw both a revival in fortunes for Penguin and a great leap forward for quizzing – and, it being the 1980s, money and big business go a long way to explaining why.

The turning point for quizzing was the brainchild of two Canadian hippies. They were Chris Haney and Scott Abbott, who in 1980 decamped to Spain with a set of reference books, enough money to keep themselves in beer and a peculiar idea: that quizzing – which in America still hadn't recovered from the scandals of the 1950s – could be the basis not of a TV show where people won cash but a board game for which they'd *pay* cash.

Now that Trivial Pursuit has become part of social history, it's easy to forget just how peculiar this idea seemed – not least to America's leading board-game companies, MB and Parker Brothers, both of whom turned it down. In the end, Haney and Abbott were forced to manufacture it

themselves, before licensing it to Selchow & Richter. They then received a game-changing boost when Glenn Close revealed to *Time* magazine that she and her fellow actors in the 1983 baby-boomer film *The Big Chill* had become ‘addicted to’ Trivial Pursuit, ‘playing it night and day’.

In 1984 the new game shifted 22 million units in America alone, and was poised to take its place at dinner parties (often held by what were then known as yuppies) all over the world. But first it had to go through a significant court case of its own.

Fred L. Worth was an air traffic controller by day and an assiduous collector of pop culture trivia by night. In 1974 he published a large collection of his most treasured facts in *The Trivia Encyclopaedia*, which like many reference books took the precaution of throwing in a deliberately false piece of information so that he’d know if anybody plagiarised his work.<sup>12</sup> The first name of the television detective Columbo, he told his readers, was Philip – even though the writers deliberately didn’t give him a first name.

Ten years later, he picked up Trivial Pursuit and thought, ‘Boy, this stuff sure looks familiar.’ And, indeed, it sure would have done. The game had lifted over a quarter of its questions from his work, complete with the same occasional mistakes and misprints. Most significantly of all, the answer to the Entertainment question ‘What is Columbo’s first name?’ was ‘Philip’. And so, in October 1984, Worth sued Haney and Abbott for \$300 million, mortgaging his house to pay the legal fees.

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12 The *London A-Z*, for instance, includes around 100 streets that don’t exist in real life so as to catch out other firms trying to pass off its maps as their own.

To his horror, however, he lost the case. Haney and Abbott didn't deny that they'd turned more than a thousand of his facts into questions, mainly by the cunning method of rearranging them slightly and adding a question mark. Instead, their defence was that the whole point of encyclopaedias and reference books is to provide information for other people to use in any way they like. The court backed this belief, ruling that the 'discovery of a fact, regardless of the quantum of labor and expense, is simply not the work of an author' – in short, that facts can't be copyrighted.

Columbo's first name wasn't the only mistake in Trivial Pursuit. Haney and Abbott even fell for a spoof history of the bra by the humorist Wallace Reyburn – which is why their answer to 'Who invented the brassiere?' was 'Otto Titzling'. Nevertheless, the game's huge success led in turn to the revival of quiz shows on television – culminating in *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, which started on ITV in 1998 and has since spread to around 160 countries. It also led in Britain to the unstoppable rise of the pub quiz, the charity quiz, the school quiz and the literary festival quiz. Less unstoppable, mind you, was the rise of the quiz machine, which became such a reliable source of income for serious quizzers (some earning £60,000 a year from them) that the makers were obliged to add the kind of impossible questions that put ordinary players off.

Essentially, though, quizzing hasn't really looked back since Glenn Close gave that *Time* interview. These days, a batch of general knowledge questions is as much a staple of newspapers as the crossword, smartphones have scores of quizzing apps available and, should you wish, you can spend hours online answering questions that will prove once and for all which Disney princess you most resemble

or which Ariana Grande song most accurately describes your life.<sup>13</sup> According to a poll commissioned by Alan Connor, 81 per cent of British adults watch, listen to or take part in quizzes, and 44 per cent do so every week. (And, fortunately, I don't think this includes the Disney/Ariana sort.)

On TV, too, quizzes are now more widespread than ever and include plenty of shows that confound all theories about Britain dumbing down. Despite its fiendishness, *Only Connect* – where teams have to find the punishingly difficult links between punishingly difficult things – is a reliable ratings hit for BBC2. And if you're one of those people who like to think that *University Challenge* has got easier over the years, I'd suggest a quick visit to YouTube, where Bamber Gascoigne can be seen asking the students of the 1960s questions that the average pub quizzier of today would regard with scorn. ('Which god is Wednesday named after?')

Where Penguin is concerned, the money and big-business side of the story is more complicated, comprising – as in the wider publishing industry – a lengthy series of take-overs and mergers. In fact, these began the day after Allen Lane died, when Penguin merged with Pearson Longman. But only in the 1980s, under its new American CEO Peter Mayer, did Penguin begin its transition into a full-on global brand.

When Mayer was appointed in 1978, Penguin was, by common agreement, somewhat moribund. He himself found it 'toffee-nosed' about commercial fiction, while

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13 In my case, Tiana and 'thank u, next' respectively.

the continuing growth of ‘vertical publishing’ (the same publisher releasing the hardback and paperback editions) meant that it was in danger of losing – or had already lost – the type of books it had always relied on. Its reputation as a cultural institution may still have been secure, but its future wasn’t.

Mayer’s solution was to combine Penguin’s longstanding – and his own – erudition with a far more businesslike approach. As part of a move towards the more aggressive marketing of commercial titles, the company threw its weight behind such distinctly non-Lane-like books as Shirley Conran’s *Lace*: the novel that contains the celebrated line ‘Which one of you bitches is my mother?’<sup>14</sup> To ensure a healthy supply of paperbacks, Mayer brought three new hardback imprints to Penguin in Britain: acquiring Michael Joseph and Hamish Hamilton, and importing Viking, which the company already owned in America. He also bought up Beatrix Potter’s publisher Frederick Warne and oversaw the expansion of Penguin in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa.

But, in more disappointing news for dumbing-down theorists, Mayer’s unashamed commerce didn’t prevent him from retaining a commitment to serious literature – most notably in 1989 when, after Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa, he refused to withdraw Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. ‘Once you say I won’t publish a book because someone doesn’t like it or someone threatens you, you’re finished,’ he said. ‘Some other group will do the same thing, or the same group will do it more.’ In something of a return to first principles, he celebrated the company’s sixtieth

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14 In 1984 *Lace* became a miniseries – and in 1993 readers of America’s *TV Guide* voted that line the greatest ever in television history.

anniversary in 1995 with the Penguin 60s: mini-books extracted almost exclusively from the highbrow end of Penguin's back catalogue, which cost 60p each and between them sold 30 million copies.

Mayer retired in 1997, but – fortunately for my purposes, given that all my questions are about books published by Penguin and its sister publishers – the mergers and take-overs continued. The big one came in 2013, when Penguin and all its affiliates joined Random House and all its affiliates to become, as you might expect, Penguin Random House, an international corporation that's now the largest publisher in Britain – and the world. Penguin's influence is felt, too, in the scores of films and TV programmes that its books have inspired – which is why, while most of the questions here are book-related, there's a fair smattering designed to test your knowledge of other media.

Penguin has, in other words, come a long way since Edward Young sketched those birds in London Zoo . . .

But in case this conclusion seems too triumphalist about both Penguin and quizzes, there's maybe one last thing that they've shared in more recent years: a fear of what the new digital world might mean. A celebratory corporate history of Penguin produced in 2009 couldn't disguise its deep anxiety about the possible disappearance of the physical book – although when contemplating an utterly changed world it prefers the customary euphemism 'exciting' to, say, 'terrifying'. (What it didn't foresee was the rise of audiobooks, which are now a much-loved part of many people's reading lives.) In *The Joy of Quiz*, Alan Connor quotes Larry Page, the co-founder of Google, saying, 'Eventually you'll have the implant, where if you think about a fact, it will just tell you the answer.' So, Connor

wonders, might all quizmasters one day have to begin with ‘an instruction for all contestants to deactivate their implants’?

Without wishing to sound unimaginative, my own answer to this question would be ‘no’ – just as, ten years on, that corporate nervousness about the end of the printed book already sounds faintly old-fashioned, now that the e-book has failed to destroy the world of publishing any more than radio and cinema did. Or before that, newspapers. Or after that, television.

And in that spirit, let me offer you this book – confident that at this very moment many of you will be holding something made of paper, and that none of you will have to deactivate your implants.

HOW IT WORKS:  
GUIDELINES TO THE  
QUIZZES

The main guideline for the quizzes that follow is that you should, of course, feel free to take no notice of my guidelines and use the book any way you like. However, for those people (perfectly normal in my opinion) who want to turn it into a competition, here's my suggested scoring system.

In the quickfire rounds that bookend each of the ten quizzes, how about two points for a perfect answer and one if you're nearly there? (Personally I'm never a fan of the half-point.) As a bonus, the title of each of these rounds is also the title of a Penguin Random House book – some harder than others – and there's two more points if you can identify who wrote it.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, although it may stick in the craw of some quizzers, you could leave the competition behind for the bonus and do that bit together.

Round 2 in every quiz is Name the Author – where there are four clues to a writer's identity in order of what's meant

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I And well done if you spotted that the main title of this section refers to the bestselling 'How It Works' series of Ladybird books for grown-ups by Jason Hazeley and Joel Morris.

to be decreasing difficulty. My suggestion here is pretty much as you'd imagine: four points (and quite a lot of glory) if you get the answer after one clue, three points (and only slightly less glory) if you get it after two, and so on.

Next comes an Extracts round, where the scoring system varies more than in the other rounds. As a result, I've explained how it might work at the start of each one.

Round 4 is a more cryptic affair that comes in three forms over the course of the book: Connect Three, Odd One Out and Order, Order. Of all the rounds, this is the one that might lead to most discussion/argument among those playing for points. But I'd propose a maximum of five if you get the basic answer *and* supply all the details as to why – i.e. name all the books and authors that the clues refer to – with fewer from there depending on how much of the full explanation is missing. Admittedly, in some of the questions, there aren't so many details to fill in, but let's not get too fiddly here. Like all the other guidelines, this one is for you to use, adapt or completely ignore as you see fit. After all, was it not the great eighteenth-century critic Joseph Addison who said, 'There is sometimes a greater judgement shown in deviating from the rules . . . than in adhering to them'?<sup>2</sup>

Happy quizzing!

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<sup>2</sup> Yes, it was.

# QUIZ I



## R O U N D I

Q U I C K F I R E :  
T H E F O U N T A I N H E A D

*All the answers here begin with A . . .*

1.

Who's the main human character in Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*?

2.

Lestat de Lioncourt is the main character in whose novel series *The Vampire Chronicles* – which began in 1976 with *Interview with the Vampire*?

3.

The speech beginning 'All the world's a stage' is in which Shakespeare play?

ROUND I

Q1

4.

Which chef's books include *Ultimate Barbecue Bible*, *Caribbean Kitchen* and *The Top 100 Recipes from Ready Steady Cook!*?

5.

Who wrote the world's best ever selling book by a teenager, *The Diary of a Young Girl*?

6.

Which philosopher was a student of Plato and a tutor of Alexander the Great?

7.

Who has published several volumes of his diaries with subtitles that include *Prelude to Power 1994–1997* and *Countdown to Iraq*?

8.

Who preceded Carol Ann Duffy as the Poet Laureate?

9.

What's the title of the classic First World War novel by Erich Maria Remarque?

10.

Who's the creator of the modern detective Daniel Hawthorne, the wartime detective Christopher Foyle and the teenage spy Alex Rider?

11.

Oliver Bowden has written several books based on which video game that features the Knights Templar as the main baddies?

12.

Whose autobiography did Gertrude Stein write in 1933?