



Five Children and It. Certification: U. 2004. 89 minutes. UK/France.

Adapted from Edith Nesbit's children's novel *Five Children and It* by David Solomons

Director John Stephenson. With Freddie Highmore, Kenneth Branagh, Eddie Izzard and Zoe Wannamaker

With David Solomons, giving an introduction and post-film Q&A.

The Author

Edith Nesbit was born in 1858 in London, the youngest of five children. She, along with her husband, Hubert Bland, was one of the earliest members of the Fabian Society, a precursor to the Labour Party. She was an 'advanced woman', cutting her hair short, smoking cigarettes and rejecting corsets. Nesbit had her first book of poetry published in 1887, and in 1899 published the first of her children's books. Her literary output was huge and she wrote approximately forty children's books over her lifetime.

The Book

Five Children and It follows the adventures of five children who are sent to live in the country with their eccentric uncle, while the first world war wages over London. After disobeying their uncle and going into the greenhouse the children find a door that leads to a secret beach. There the children meet a Psammead, a sand fairy who grants them a wish each day that will last until sunset. Inevitably the wishes don't turn out the way they planned and excitement ensues along with a lesson to be learnt. Along the way they must try to get to know their strange cousin, Horace, and come to terms with the fact that they may never see their father again.

Edith Nesbit's major works:

The Story of the Treasure Seekers, 1899

The Phoenix and the Carpet, 1904,

The Railway Children, 1906,

The Enchanted Castle, 1907.



The Adaptation

David Solomons has had a varied career, both writing and adapting screenplays. *Five Children and It* was his first feature film, and has earned him recognition. He is currently working on an adaptation of Eva Ibbotson's novel *The Great Ghost Rescue*, due to be released in 2011.

The film diverges a great deal from the original story, while maintaining the same feeling of childish wonder and learning. The main thread of the story stays the same, five children find a sand fairy who grants wishes, but the wishes and their consequences are, for the most part, changed. The film moves the children to a World War I setting, which adds a whole new emotional dimension, adds some new characters and changes the location of the sand fairy to give the film a similar structure to *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

David Solomons' major works:

The Fabulous Bagel Boys, 2001.
The Phoenix and the Carpet, 2004/5
Not Doing Christmas, 2006
Lady Susan, 2007

Awards and Reviews

This adaptation of *Five Children and It* won a Crystal Heart Award from the 2005 Heartland Film Festival. The film's composer, Jane Antonia Cornish also won the Anthony Asquith Award for Best New British Composer at the 2005 BAFTA Awards.

Empire magazine called *Five Children and It* 'a refreshing family film' and said 'once you're on the wavelength, Izzard is a treat.'

Film notes by Laura Bailey