Fabula – a child-friendly typeface

The Fabula typeface was originally designed as a screen font as part of a project that produced software to enable children and teachers to produce bilingual story books. Since then, changes have been made to its design and it is now, additionally, a font suitable for titling and text setting in large sizes.

Fabula has been designed by a team lead by Professor Sue Walker, Director of the AHRB-funded Typographic Design for Children Project at The University Reading: Conrad Taylor, Vincent Connare, Gerry Leonidas and Jose Scaglione. It has been used in a series of tests designed to find out what children in Year 2 think about typefaces in the books they read: they described Fabula as: 'clear, so you can see it properly', 'thick, fat', 'normal', 'like an ordinary book'.

Fabula has a number of characteristics that the project team held to be important for children's reading:
- long ascenders and descenders to help identify the word shape
- an informal 'feel'
    - rounded stroke ends
    - a rounded 'e'
- a clear distinction between characters that might be easily confused, such as 'a' and 'o', and small letter 'l', capital 'i' and figure one.

A particular feature of Fabula is that it has a double storey 'a' as standard to make as much difference as possible between characters that children sometimes confuse, such as 'o' and 'a'. Our work suggests that children may not necessarily find non-infant characters (in particular double storey a's and g's) problematic. Most children in our study were well aware that there were different forms of a and g, and some even made the point that a is what we write and a is what we read. It was also the case, however, that some children perceived than 'a' and 'g' as 'harder' 'ɑ'and 'ɡ', and while this did not appear to affect their ability to read, it may have some impact on their motivation.