

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

No.227

November 2017

the children's book magazine online

**Fairytale reading
for Christmas**

Books of the Year

Authorgraph interview

Kate Saunders

Lauren Child and Judith Kerr

www.booksforkeeps.co.uk

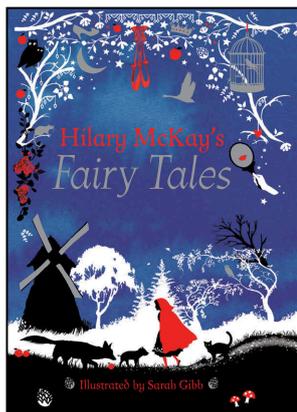


CONTENTS

- 2 Guest editorial:** Sarah Odedina of Scoop magazine
- 3 All hail the new Children's Laureate:** an interview with Lauren Child
- 4 2017: the Books of the Year:** our panel makes their choice
- 6 Books for Giving 2017:** Ferelith Hordon plays Santa
- 8 Authorgraph:** Kate Saunders interviewed by Philip Womack
- 10 Ten of the Best** fairy tale collections chosen by Ann Lazim
- 12 Once upon a time:** Hilary McKay on her new collection of fairy tales
- 13 Truly Two:** Catherine MacPhail and Robert Louis Stevenson
- 14 A Talent for Happiness:** Judith Kerr interviewed by Nicholas Tucker
- 16 Windows into Illustration:** Ehsan Abdollahi
- 18 Two Children Tell:** Nick meets monsters
- 19 I Wish I'd Written...** Jonathan Meres chooses
- 19 Good Reads** chosen by pupils at Highfield Primary School, Enfield
- 20 Brian Alderson** reviews two new exhibitions
- 21 Reviewers and reviews**
Under 5s (Pre-School/Nursery/Infant) + Ed's Choice
5-8 (Infant/Junior) + New Talent
8-10 (Junior/Middle)
10-14 (Middle/Secondary)
14+ (Secondary/Adult)
- 32 Classics in Short No. 126**
Children of the New Forest

COVER STORY

This issue's cover illustration is from **Fairy Tales** by **Hilary McKay**, illustrated by **Sarah Gibb**. Thanks to **Macmillan Children's Books** for their help with this Christmas cover.



guest editorial

Sarah Odedina, Editor-in-Chief, Scoop magazine



The world is full of stories. People use stories to navigate life – their own lives as well as the lives of others. In these rapidly changing, fractured times stories give us a way to understand and a way to share our experiences. Never before have they been as important as they are now nor has there ever been such a loud and vocal demand for stories that reflect all our stories, giving voice to people previously marginalised from the publishing canon.

It is a great time to be a young reader in terms of the wealth of choice, the range of voices, and the quality of the stories on offer. It is now possible for the first time, I believe, to see a truly golden world of literature that offers access to all children and all authors.

Just in the last few days there has been the exciting announcement of the launch of the new publishing house **Knights Of**. Aimee Felon, one of the founders, says, '**Knights Of** was born out of a frustration with the lack of representative voices and narratives in children's fiction. With **Knights Of** we can publish uniquely, putting our differences first and celebrating them, making it central to our business.' In so doing they offer all children the opportunity to see themselves in books as well as to read stories with children young readers consider different from themselves in starring roles.

The sales figures for children's books continue to grow across all sectors of the market, from pre-school to teen and YA. This autumn will no doubt ensure a bumper year for the sales of teen and YA titles, with the launch of the highly anticipated **The Book of Dust** by Philip Pullman, which pulled crowds to bookshops at midnight on publication day, as well as a new John Green title five years after the phenomenally successful **The Fault In Our Stars**.

Young readers know that they can find something to read that will reflect their interests; teachers and carers know that they can access a huge resource of titles that spans decades of innovative and brave publishing, and publishers are now waking up to the demands of society to break out from their traditional white middle-class roots to ensure stories that encompass a more realistic portrait of society and the wider world are there to give children the bigger picture.

But still we have to work hard to allow all children access to the joys that are contained in the written word. Many children struggle with literacy or indeed don't 'click' with the reading habit. Michael Morpurgo and Chris Riddell

are vocal on the need for children to see reading as a pleasure and not an educational chore. It is only once someone reads for pleasure that the true joys of stories are unlocked for them, and organisations like BookTrust are at the vanguard of this movement.

The charity's c.e.o., Diana Gerald, said: 'At **BookTrust** we are all about getting children reading for pleasure. Children who enjoy reading are happier, healthier and more empathetic ...'

Working alongside the fantastic range of titles published every year are magazines like **Scoop**, which celebrates the world of stories and aims to offer young readers a world of words in which to find pleasure. The concise nature of the writing (the longest piece in the magazine is 2000 words) means that the bite-sized offerings allow a more reluctant reader very manageable pieces to read while also offering more avid readers a 'Sunday supplement' type of experience across fifty-two pages of contrasting and complementary writing. Within its pages a young reader can enjoy fiction by writers such as Michael Morpurgo and Piers Torday as well as exciting new debut voices like Nadine Wild-Palmer and Kheryn Callender, poetry, non-fiction dealing with issues as diverse as the ability of wild dogs to communicate by sneezing, and the phenomenon of milky-seas that can be viewed from outer space, recipes, crafts, jokes and riddles, puzzles and lots of wonderful art. The magazine is themed monthly and each focus ties in with wider issues in the world that the child would be interested in, such as Black History Month, peace and pacifism, environmental issues or the role of girls and women around the world.

Today's child in today's world wants choice, wants the freedom to choose, wants to see their world reflected in the words that they read and wants to hear from their peers and friends about what is good. If we as publishers, writers, librarians, teachers and carers don't recognise this we will not be able to ensure that the love of reading that we so want to share is indeed passed on. I think we are all getting much better, even if there is still some way to go.

Scoop is published monthly, find out more www.scoopthemag.co.uk.



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All hail the new Children's Laureate

Nicholas Tucker talks to **Lauren Child** about her plans for her years in office as the **Waterstones Children's Laureate**.

Lauren Child is the 10th Waterstones Children's Laureate. I am talking to her about this in the foyer of London's Langham Hotel. Her love of different materials plus her ability to go for just the right detail and colour in her illustrations is reflected as always in the elegance of her appearance. So what are her major plans for the next two years? Is she going to concentrate on illustration, texts or both together?

Both. But I have always drawn since I was a child, and I still don't think book illustration is considered seriously enough as an art form in its own right. I would like to do something about that. Think of Ernest Shepherd's A.A. Milne illustrations! Other illustrations at the time could have been so sentimental but his are minimalist and never in the least cloying. Or consider the huge contribution Quentin Blake's illustrations made to Roald Dahl's popularity. We normally look at illustrations as an accompaniment to a text. But viewing them separately, as I was doing the other day at an exhibition of David McKee's work, is a reminder of how very good they can also be as individual works of art.

So when you talk to children as Laureate are you going to tell them to go away and write, draw, or create their own picture book and do both?

Go away and stare out of the window! Go and collect ideas and try something! Just recently on walks with my daughter I have been taking photographs of those funny little things you can always see outside once you are looking out for them. Children are constantly asking me 'Where do you get your ideas from?' I think it's more a case of 'Where don't you get your ideas from?' I intend to go further with such photos on my website, both by me and I hope from children sending in their own efforts as well.

Are you going to do a lot of travelling?

I hope not. I would rather follow the example of Quentin Blake when he was Laureate. This was not to spend his time visiting schools all over Britain but to have a series of open meetings and discussions about ideas and creativity with people both from the world of books but also from films and comedy who have over the years influenced me and others as readers, writers and illustrators. And I would also like to raise the issue of boredom, and how potentially creative it can be. Because the only way to get out of boredom is to do something, and allowing ourselves to experience boredom for a while could also eventually prove to be the stimulus for starting out on some sort of creativity.

But isn't trying to re-fashion boredom into a potentially positive state of mind going to be hard?

IPhones and so on are brilliant things, but I just want to children to realise that they don't have to be on them all the time. You don't always need to be entertained. There is always the possibility of finding that creative thing within you, or else going out even if it's just for a few minutes and simply registering what you can see. The other day I had to sit in a hospital waiting room for four hours before being seen for something I was worried about at the time but which is OK now. I went there in a hurry without a book or anything else. So with nothing to do I found a pen and started writing something



that has since turned out to be interesting enough to be included in my next book. How glad I was that because I did not have my phone with me I was forced to use my time so much better. But I don't want to impose another extra activity on children that they may not want to do. I would rather offer them some encouragement to get off their phones sometimes and then leave the rest up to them.

So how do you feel about becoming the new Children's Laureate?

When they first asked me my first reaction was, Gosh, I don't know if I could do that. But once I had talked about it with others I began to get some ideas and now I feel very excited about it. I want to go on working too – I have just finished one book and after that will start on a new one. I know I will be interrupted a lot of the time, but since I have had a daughter I have got quite used to that anyhow!

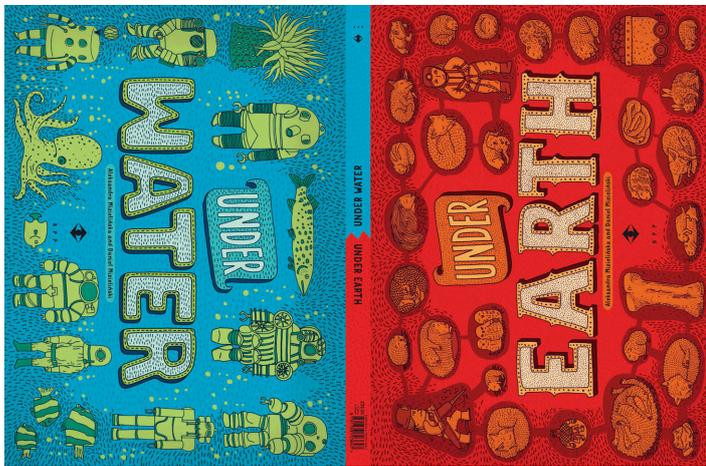
It is always such a pleasure talking to Lauren and her way of combining proper seriousness with intervals of loud laughter. Supported by her brilliant press secretary Phil Perry, she should be quite an act over the next two years. This is an excellent appointment.



Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

Books of the Year 2017

More than most, 2017 has felt like a year of hellos and goodbyes, hellos to new publishers, to a welcome new focus on BAME authors, to a new Children's Laureate, and to positive new initiatives such as **Empathy Day**; goodbyes to authors Babette Cole, Dahlov Ipcar, Dick Bruna and Michael Bond. In the midst of this, we asked a panel of contributors to choose the books they think we'll be reading after 2017 has been and gone.

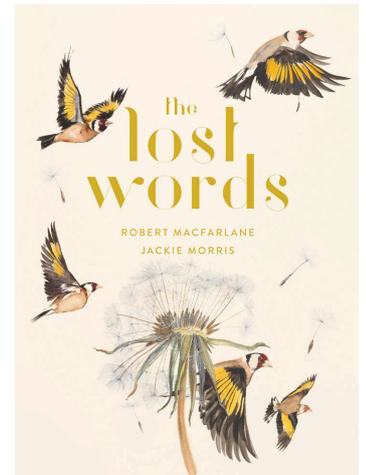
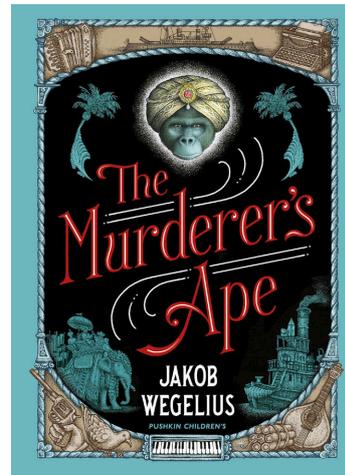


Pam Dix, Chair Ibbey UK

Under Water, Under Earth by Aleksandra and Daniel Mizielinska has delighted me in many ways. Its size and shape are exciting and the sense of excitement continues with the realisation that the book works in both directions; one opening takes the reader under the earth and the reverse is under the sea. It delivers all that a brilliant information book can. It is graphically exciting, links the visual and the text in a variety of ways and uses an astonishing array of techniques to do this including graphs, arrows, diagrams and other visual clues. Each new page has a different visual format so there are constant surprises about the presentation of information, and challenges to look ever more closely. Best of all is its truly worldwide perspective. Every page of information will make comparisons between all parts of the world so that the learning is broad and relevant to children wherever they are.

Daniel Hahn, writer, editor, translator

Even amid what feels like a particularly spoilt-for-choice sort of season, my 'Book of the Year' stands out for me as an unusual and special one. It's always folly to try and predict which contemporary books posterity will consider 'classics', but today I'm going to do it anyway: **The Murderer's Ape**, by Swedish writer Jakob Wegelius, is built to last. It has everything my favourite children's books have: an unforgettable central character (Sally Jones, ship's engineer) on an exciting adventure (she's travelling the high seas, trying to solve a murder); it has beautiful illustrations, an immersive and perfectly-constructed plot, and atmosphere galore; and a colourful cast of loyal friends and kind strangers and shadowy enemies... All these familiar components, and yet I've never read anything quite like it. An absolute treat. (Oh, and did I mention that our hero, Sally Jones, is a gorilla?)



Andrea Reece, managing editor Books for Keeps, director Oxford Literary Festival children's programme

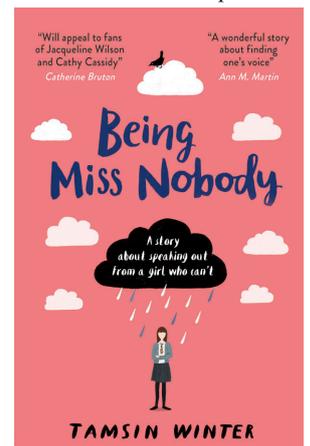
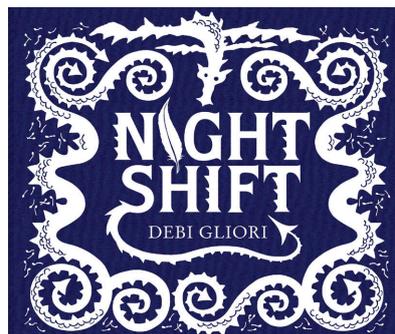
Jonathan Stroud's ghost-hunting **Lockwood & Co** series reached its thoroughly satisfying conclusion this year with book five, **The Empty Grave**. Intelligent, well-written, full of action and starring characters readers have come to love, I'm bereft knowing there won't be a new episode in 2018. Children's poetry is booming and Joseph Coelho's **Overheard in a Tower Block** skilfully and beautifully describes deeply felt experiences and personal observations so that we can all share the emotions. And **Hilary McKay's Fairy Tales** is unmissable too, stories we have known since childhood freshly told and given new life and extra magic.

SF Said, author and library campaigner

The children's book I've enjoyed most in 2017 is **The Lost Words**, by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris. It's a mesmerising celebration of the natural world and the language we use to describe it. Macfarlane conjures a series of spells to evoke flora and fauna, from acorn to wren, while Morris's art creates a visual and tactile object so immersive, it feels like a living thing in itself. Described by Macfarlane as 'a book for children aged 3 to 100', it should delight readers of all ages, and would make an ideal gift for Christmas, or any time of year!

Jake Hope, consultant, reading development and children's books

Night Shift by Debi Gliori is an impressive, well considered articulation of what it means and how it feels to be depressed. A sophisticated picture book forged from fog, shaped from shadows and drawn out of darkness, it gives voice



to that which often remains voiceless and can isolate. Listlessness and lack of colour is captured by the black and white illustrations, punctuated occasionally by volatile red. There's a looming, oppressive mood as muscular, hollow-eyed dragons – almost parasitic in nature – become metaphors for the condition. The triumph of the book is the way it uses verbal and visual language to shine a light onto the condition, enabling this to be better explained, shared and to contribute an endpoint to some of the loneliness and stigma that often accompanies it, offering some hope without losing power or falling into platitudes.

Margaret Pemberton, school library consultant

For younger readers, I've chosen **Fergal is Fuming**, about a young dragon who cannot control his fire when he gets angry. This amusing story shows how he learns to keep calm and keep his friends. Brilliantly simple illustrations with a lot of humour make this a future classic. **Ban this Book** by Alan Gratz is a book that reflects some of the issues surrounding political correctness and whether people should be free to read what they want to. It is very readable and yet extremely thought provoking with echoes of **The Day They Came to Arrest the Book** by Nat Hentoff. For teenagers I've chosen **Being Miss Nobody**, the story of Rosalind who has selective mutism and finds she is being bullied at her new school because of this. She fights back by setting up a blog, but finds that this has its own dangers. The story really does make you think and brings home some of the problems with social media.

Jon Biddle, Moorlands Primary Academy, Patron of Reading, EmpathyLab

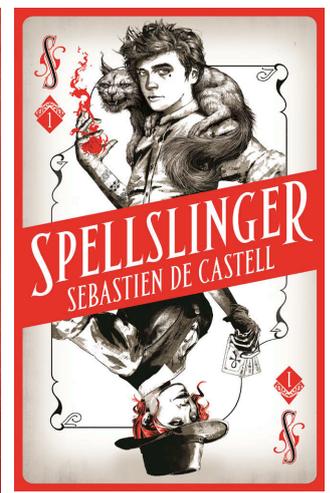
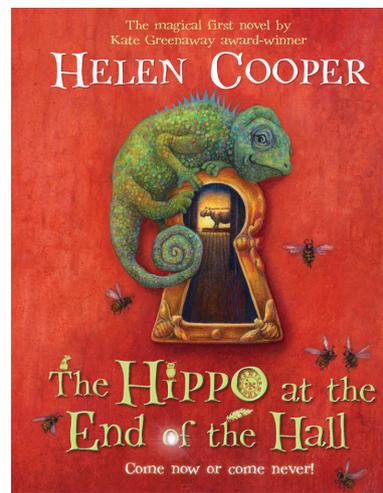
There have been some wonderful graphic novels featuring female protagonists published over the past couple of years, including **Smile and Sisters** by Raina Telgemier, **Nimona** by Noelle Stevenson and **Tamsin & The Deep** by The Phoenix Comic. **Roller Girl** by Victoria Jamieson is definitely another to add to the list. Children will be swept along by the pacy plot and empathise with 12-year-old Astrid as she signs up for her local roller derby summer camp. During her time there, she learns about how friendships can develop and evolve, and sometimes wither, in a short space of time, about the importance of accepting new challenges, and about the difficulties involved in trying to find your place within your family. Wonderfully illustrated, full of energy and highly recommended for Year 6 upwards.

Fen Coles, Letterbox Library

Coming at the end of 2016, I was delighted to see the return of a queer classic, soon followed by a new, distinctly modern, no less 'queering' fairy tale. Carol Ann Duffy's 2004 **Queen Munch and Queen Nibble** finally arrived back on our shelves courtesy of the bright, fresh imprint, Two Hoots. With additional artwork by Lydia Monks and a new, finely finished, cover design, the 2016 edition has the weight and feel of a satisfying bedtime read, ideal for newly independent readers. And then, brother and sister team, Lynn and David Roberts, brought us a mid-century fairy tale, **Sleeping Beauty** (released in paperback this year). Starting out in a 1950s seeped in futuristic pop culture and ending up in a distant utopia, this is a superbly crafted retelling of an old tale. Magical, visionary and manifestly feminist storytelling imagines a world populated entirely by women in which girls are raised by their 'aunts' and are rescued by other girls. Sublime love stories or romantic friendships, like all great fairy tales, these texts are rich with metaphors and a playfulness which allows them to be read every which way.

Nicholas Tucker, honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

Helen Cooper's **The Hippo at the End of the Hall** is her first novel, but you would never guess that from the ease and poise of her writing. Immediately young Ben finds his way to the ageing, generally shambolic Gee Museum he finds things there that help him piece together the mystery of his missing father plus the existence



of a family he never knew he had. All this is gripping enough but the addition of the author's numerous illustrations, many taken from actual small and remote museums visited in the past, make this truly stunning book a pleasure to look at as well as to read.

Philip Womack, author and critic

Sebastian de Castell's **Spellslinger** is a roister-doistering tale of a magical world navigated by a boy who, alas, has no magic; full of memorable characters (including a red-haired lady card sharp), this is one of the year's standouts. I'd also thoroughly recommend Jacob Sager Weinstein's brilliantly funny **The City of Secret Rivers**, in which a young American must navigate the madness of London's water systems (try it, honestly); and Scarlett Thomas's lovely fantasy **Dragon's Green**, which manages to be both unusual and traditional simultaneously, as well as entirely gripping and beautifully written; any book that can casually refer to Antigone and Beckett gets my vote.

- Under Water, Under Earth**, Aleksandra and Daniel Mizielińska, Templar / Big Picture Press, 9781783703647
- The Murderer's Ape**, Jakob Wegelius, translated by Peter Graves, Pushkin Children's Books, 978-1-7826-9161-7, £16.99 hbk
- Lockwood & Co, The Empty Grave**, Jonathan Stroud, Corgi Children's Books, 978-0-5525-7579-9, £7.99 pbk
- Overheard in a Tower Block**, Joseph Coelho, Otter-Barry Books, 978-1-9109-5958-9, £6.99 pbk
- Hilary McKay's Fairy Tales**, Hilary McKay, Macmillan Children's Books, 978-1447292296, £12.99 hbk
- The Lost Words**, by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris, Hamish Hamilton, 978-0-2412-5358-8, £20.00 hbk
- Night Shift**, Debi Gliori, Hot Key Books, 978-1471406232, £9.99 hbk
- Spellslinger**, Sebastian de Castell, Hot Key Books, 978-1-7857-6132-4, £7.99 pbk
- The City of Secret Rivers**, Jacob Sager Weinstein, Walker Books, 978-1-4063-6885-7, £9.99 hbk
- Dragon's Green**, Scarlett Thomas, Canongate Books, 978-1-7821-1702-5, £9.99 hbk
- Roller Girl**, Victoria Jamieson, Puffin, 978-0-1413-7899-2, £7.99 pbk
- The Hippo at the End of the Hall**, Helen Cooper, David Fickling Books, 978-1910989753, £10.99 hbk
- Queen Munch and Queen Nibble**, Carol Ann Duffy, illus Lydia Monks, Two Hoots, 978-1509829262, £12.99 hbk
- Sleeping Beauty**, Lynn Roberts and David Roberts, Pavilion Children's Books, 978-1-8436-5339-4, £6.99 pbk
- Fergal is Fuming**, Robert Starling, Andersen Press, 978-1-7834-4533-2, £11.99 hbk
- Ban this Book**, Alan Gratz, Starscape Books, 978-0-7653-8556-7, £12.19 hbk
- Being Miss Nobody**, Tamsin Winter, Usborne, 978-1-4749-2727-7, £6.99 pbk

Happy Christmas Reading 2017

Going into a bookshop at this time of year is like going into an old-fashioned sweet shop, says **Books for Keeps** editor **Ferelith Hordon**, the shelves are full of gorgeous, mouth-watering treats. What to choose, for a child, for the family? Find out here.

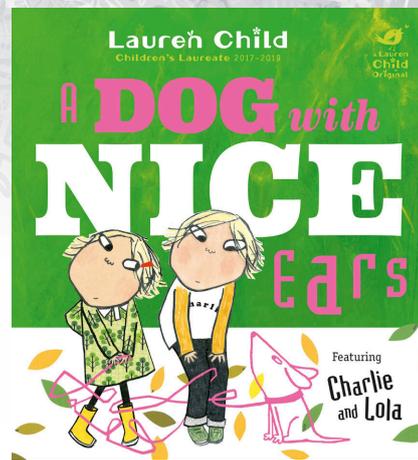
Presents for the very young

No batteries, no switches, there's nothing to go wrong in a book for baby or toddler, just endless pleasure. Even so, a bit of activity is great especially if it involves noises. **Bim, Bam, Boom** by Frédéric Stehr and **Say Zoop** by Herve Tullet hit the mark here; bright board books that demand the reader noisily joins in. If a bit more play is wanted then **Dear Zoo Book and Puzzle Blocks** is ideal, reintroducing an old favourite and adding nine sturdy cubes too illustrated with Rod Campbell's much-loved characters.

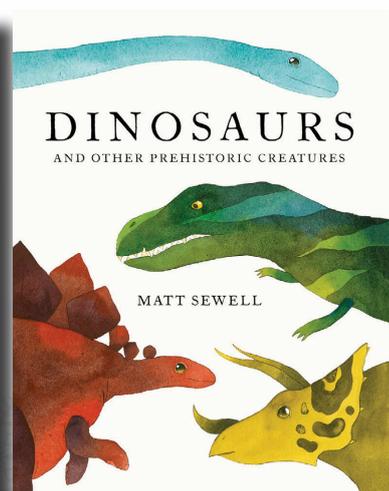
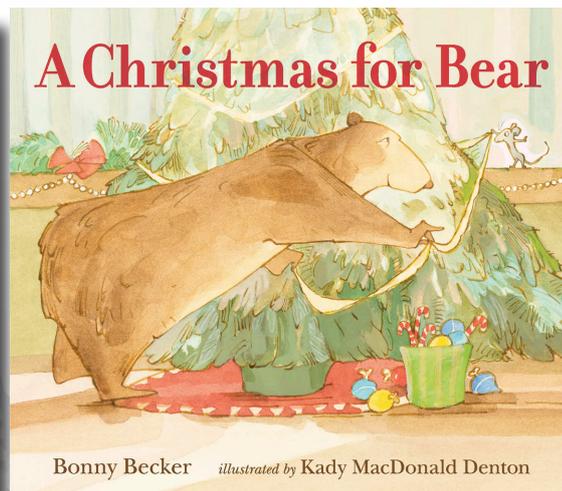
What about a story? One that chimes with the season is the lovely **One Christmas Wish** from Katherine Rundell and Emily Sutton. Here a young boy's Christmas is changed when he finds a set of magical Christmas tree decorations. Full of humour and adventure and with delightful illustrations, this is a book that will become a favourite for many Christmases to come. Then there are the Christmas books that bring familiar friends into the house – Mick Inkpen's **Wibbly Pig** is always welcome, and he is having a ticklish Christmas in **Tickly Christmas Wibbly Pig**. Lauren Child's Lola knows exactly what she wants for Christmas; it must be **A Dog with Nice Ears**. Her parents are adamant "Absolutely NO dogs". Lola, however, has a way of getting what she wants. As ever this is visually inventive and verbally dextrous. It is good to make new friends. **A Christmas for Bear** by Bonny Becker, illustrated by Kady MacDonald Denton introduces a grumpy bear and an eager mouse. The tree has been decorated, the food prepared but where are the presents? Mouse is anxious – does Bear mean it, there will be no presents? The gentle humour of the text finds a perfect accompaniment in illustrations that bring the characters to life. Older siblings will enjoy Chris van Allsburg's classic **The Polar Express** now in a new anniversary edition accompanied by a CD, the story read by Liam Neeson.

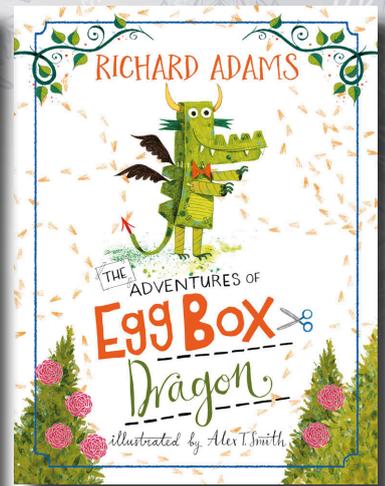
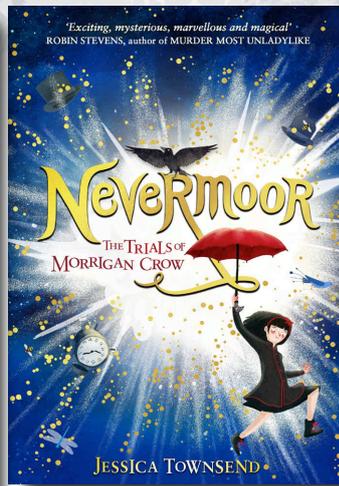
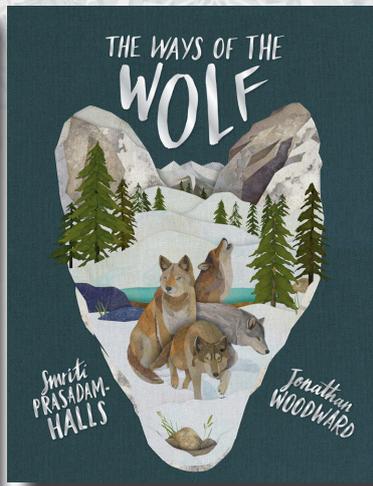
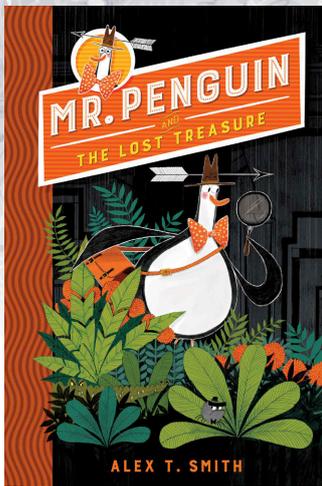
For under the tree

The noise, tinsel, even chocolate can get a bit overwhelming; time to retire with a good book. Here is a sackful of suggestions, no wrapping paper required, bringing laughter, adventure, friendships.



The Wild Fluffalump, a new book by Mwenye Hadithi and Adrienne Kennaway transport its young audience to the sunshine of Africa. Vibrant colours and a catchy rhyming text bring real warmth to the story. What is a Fluffalump? It's puffy, fluffy, wriggly and squeaky. The animals make suggestions, but none of them gets it right – though the illustrations provide clues making this a fun book to read with the young. Another book to share is **Singing in the Rain**. There is a CD to encourage singing along as well as the chance to read for oneself. However it is the lively, joyous illustrations by Tim Hopgood that will establish this as a family favourite. Another destined to become a favourite is **The Adventures of Egg Box Dragon** by Richard Adams of **Watership Down** fame and illustrated by Alex T Smith. Egg Box Dragon may be made of cardboard but he has a very special skill – he can find things and when there is a royal crisis, Egg Box Dragon can help. Here is a lively story perfectly illustrated, delightful bedtime reading. Already firm favourites at bedtime, Shift McGifty and Slippery Sam have a particularly festive adventure in their new collection – **Shifty McGifty and Slippery Sam – Jingle Bells** in which they help out Father Christmas himself. Sparkling text and illustrations, an irresistible duo – no wonder these books are so popular with children. A new character sure to win fans is Mr Penguin, created by Alex T Smith. Adventurer and Penguin, part Poirot, part Indiana Jones, he tackles his first mystery in **Mr Penguin and The Lost Treasure**, and great fun it is too. For older children winter nights provide the perfect time for that new book. Jessica Townsend catapults us into adventure with Morrigan Crow in **Nevermoor**, beautifully packaged, sparkling with imagination, while **Aubrey and the Terrible Ladybirds** combines a serious message about the environment and a young hero who can talk to animals. For an exciting mix of history and magic, **Witchborn** by Nicholas Bowling is another to grip the imagination. No magic but a very contemporary dilemma and an absorbing read comes from Gill Lewis in **Sky Dancer** while the stylish **Optimists Die First** introduces two very different protagonists with humour and realism.





Books for Sharing

Christmas is about sharing, especially at bedtime. Michael Morpurgo has chosen a cornucopia of traditional tales in **Greatest Magical Stories** retold by a galaxy of writers and lavishly illustrated. Poetry of course is perfect for sharing: Axel Scheffler's lively illustrations capture the curious verses of Frantz Wittkamp adapted by Roger McGough in **Fish Dream of Trees**. For infinite variety there is **Poems for Every Day of the Year**, edited by Allie Esiri. This gorgeous anthology introduces classics, traditional rhymes, jingles, ballads – something for everyone. Also perfect is the classic **A Child's Garden of Verses** here beautifully illustrated by Michael Foreman and with a special introduction by Alexander McCall Smith. These are gifts to treasure.

Facts, facts and more facts

Information may be available at the touch of a button, but there is a special pleasure in browsing, turning pages, picking subjects at random. The **DK Children's Encyclopedia** is ideal for this presenting topics in a cheerful and accessible way, encouraging repeat visits and further exploration. Exploring the heavens is the aim of **Starfinder for Beginners**. Here each constellation is linked directly by its relationship to the Plough making identification much easier; a novel and interesting approach likely to inspire a lasting interest. Dinosaurs are always fascinating: **Dinosaurs and other Prehistoric Creatures** by Matt Sewell is a lovely addition to the canon presenting engaging, colourful images with an accessible text. **The Ways of the Wolf** brings to life the wolf and its environment through the informative text and atmospheric illustrations and will really entrance young naturalists. And for the potential quiz-whizz there is **Facts!: One for every day of the year** – a lively miscellany of facts, yes, one for every day of the year, to intrigue and delight even the most curious, and stylishly illustrated.

Gifts to surprise and delight

Christmas would not be complete without an interactive maze. Something new is **Find Me: Hide and Seek** from Anders Arhoj or **Follow Finn** imagined by Peter Goes – a bewildering journey through a fantastic landscape. Illustrator Jim Kay works his magic on **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban** bringing to the stories new energy and detail through his extraordinary talent. Take a look at Philip Ardagh's sumptuous **The World of Moominvalley**, everything you want to know about Moomins and their world, the perfect companion to the new edition of **Finn Family Moomintroll**. Beautifully remastered and packaged this is a gift to delight existing fans as well create new friends. From illustrator Jackie Morris comes two books. Her **Ice Bear** and **Snow Cat** now appear in large format celebrating her extraordinary art. Also highly recommended is **Lines** by Suzy Lee who creates the icy world of a solitary skater in exquisite lines, a silent picture book that speaks directly to the imagination.

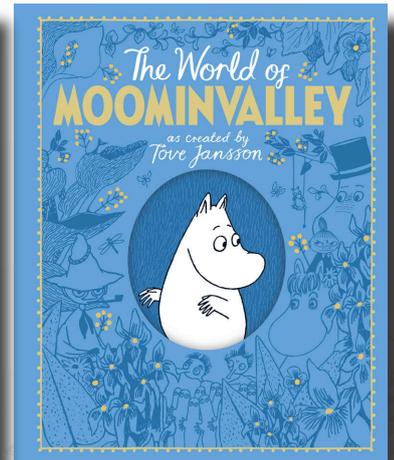
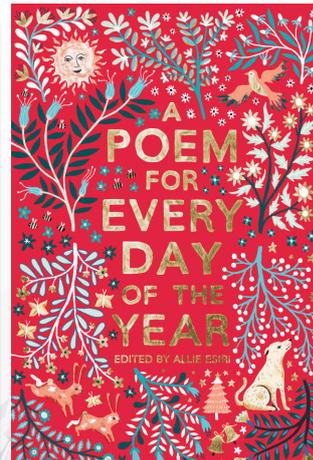
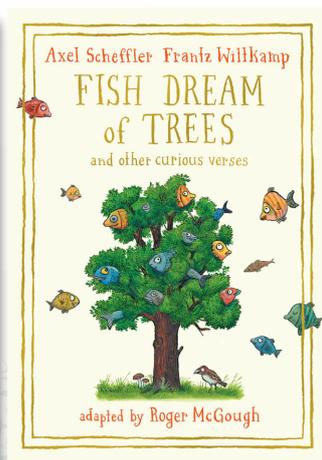
Finally, the all-important stocking fillers

Sam Usher's picture book **Snow** is now available as a charming miniature; a gem is **The Poet's Dog**, a classic by Patricia MacLachlan, and for the very brave, **Barry Loser's Christmas Joke Book** will have you groaning but laughing...

Use this [link](#) to find a complete list of all books mentioned.



Farelith Hordon is an active member of **CILIP YLG** and has served as Chair of both YLG London and of the National Committee. She is editor of **Books for Keeps** and of **IBBYLink**, the online journal of **IBBY UK**.



Authorgraph

No.227

Kate Saunders
Interviewed by
Philip Womack

The **Land of Neverendings**, Kate Saunders' latest book, contains many of the elements that imbue her children's fiction: the sparky, joyous japey which characterised her novel **Beswitched**, in which a modern girl found herself in a 1930s boarding school; and the deep sense of loss that pervaded her Costa-winning **Five Children on the Western Front**, a beautifully written follow up to E Nesbit's **Five Children and It** sequence.

In **The Land of Neverendings**, the heroine Emily's disabled sister has recently died, and remarkable things start happening when it appears her toys come to life, and are seeping through into our world from their own imaginary realm of Smockeroon. It's a very funny book, and also powerful and honest in its examination of grief.

I meet Saunders in her North London house: a Victorian terrace near Archway tube. In the kitchen her deaf cat is sitting on a chair; its occasional mews make it appear as if it's adding to the conversation. Which is entirely appropriate, of course, given the subject matter of Saunders' book. Over the afternoon I spend with her, our conversation ranges widely, from the importance of mirrors to Lewis Carroll, to German royalty, to the Glorious Revolution, and to the protocols of grief; and Saunders is always witty, wise, and kind, with a finely tuned intelligence that cuts through absurdities and pretensions.

There's an enormous fantasy input into our imaginative lives, because it explains the world, or tries to.

Lewis Carroll's **Alice in Wonderland** looms large: the characters at Emily's school put on a play version. I ask about fantasy: is it in some way a search for truth? 'You're not wrong though,' she answers. 'People go to a fantasy world for comfort, for escapism. And I think children are very well aware of what's a real story and what isn't a story ... There's an enormous fantasy input into our imaginative lives, because it explains the world, or tries to. And it's fun. Romantic and fun, and you have adventures.'

There's also an oblique reference to C S Lewis, in the form of a science fiction writer called Staples (Lewis's middle name.) Saunders is a huge fan – even to the extent of reading his book on '16th century verse – brackets, not drama,' she jokes. I ask if Saunders read the **Narnia** books as a child? 'Loved them. Particularly **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**, because of this wonderfully potent image, the wardrobe. Like I loved **Alice through the Looking Glass**, because of the bit where she climbs through the mirror. Who hasn't looked then at the room in the mirror and thought – it's just like our room, but it's not, and it's the wrong way round? Childhood in itself is a state of powerlessness, often with flashes of danger that you can't do anything about ... And so naturally children love stories about other children when there is an escape which no one can interfere with - it's a wardrobe. I love them. I've been looking in wardrobes for years now.' Her favourite character was Mrs Beaver: 'something of an inspiration to me because she was so calm in the face of danger.'

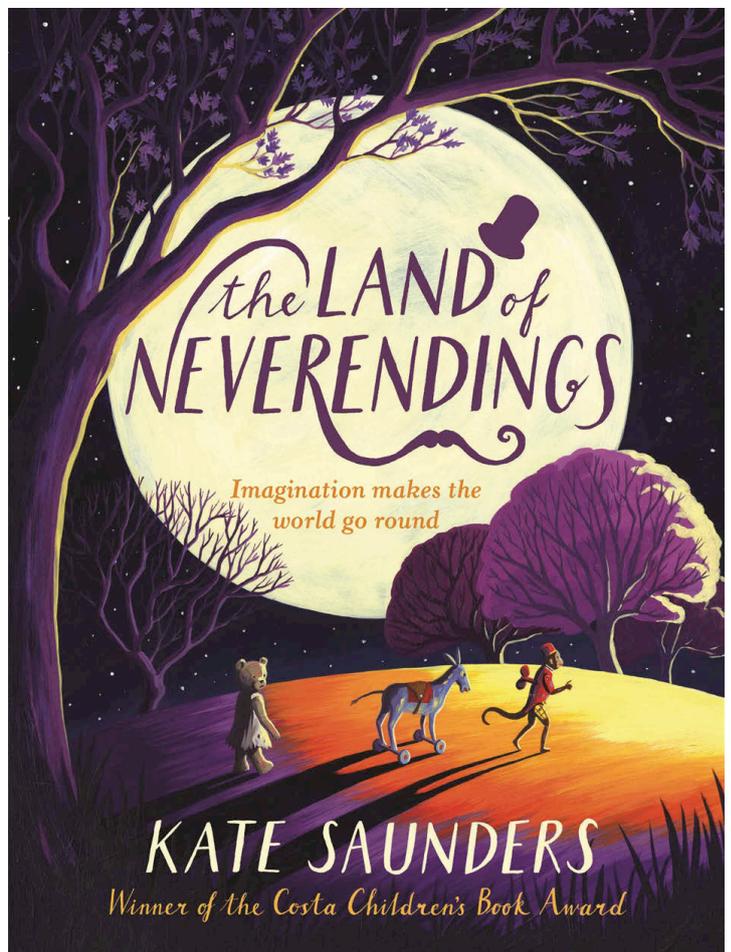
She loved Lewis's authorial voice: 'the idea that I'm here to entertain you. I'm not here to give you a lesson. In my books you might meet

sad things, but that's a story. And again story is such a good prism. Why do stories exist? To explain, as much as anything else, I think, the inexplicable.' In characteristic manner she flashes me a wry look: 'Oh I don't know - getting a bit deep.'

Why do stories exist? To explain, as much as anything else, I think, the inexplicable

Lewis and his brother buried their toys in the garden when their house was sold: 'They were anxious to put away childish things, I suppose, but it was just weird because they weren't really putting them away, were they? What if you have to bury your toys in the garden so that other children won't play with them? I thought that was quite spooky. I also thought how spooky it would be if you moved to their house and then you dug in the garden if the drains were changed or something, and you found a box of withered Edwardian toys, how weird that would be, so that was part of the inspiration for my book.'

There's an enormous fantasy input into our imaginative lives, because it explains the world, or tries to. The chaotic, manic, very silly toys in **The Land of Neverendings** slip through into our dimension from a land called Smockeroon. Saunders tells how the idea stemmed first from Bearland, which was what she called the place her toys went to as a child; and then from the stories she told to her son, nephews and nieces.





She was amazed by the way that the children would react; in particular, to a singer character she made up called Nancy Minceover; her niece would invent songs for her, and 'completely walked away with the character and made it something, which I thought was brilliant. ... Yes, we had toys going to an imaginary place. I'm sure lots of people do this. When you can't see them, when you're at school ... and the answer is that they're having a gay old time, and you tell stories about them.'

There is a great sadness at the heart of Saunders' book, which is also touched on **Five Children on the Western Front**, and that is the death of her only son, Felix, at the age of 19. The new book confronts that grief directly: 'I cried writing it, and in the end, I hadn't been brave enough in the first draft and my editor pointed out the bits that weren't working and I realised, without my having to say very much, she was right about the bits that weren't working because I'd stopped being completely truthful.'

She continues: 'Children don't get enough chance to express something that we, grown-ups, don't like talking about; and we don't like talking about death, and we don't like talking about the death

Children don't get enough chance to express something that we, grown-ups, don't like talking about; and we don't like talking about death

of children. So it does make you a freak if your child's died, and it makes people scared of you, because they have no experience.'

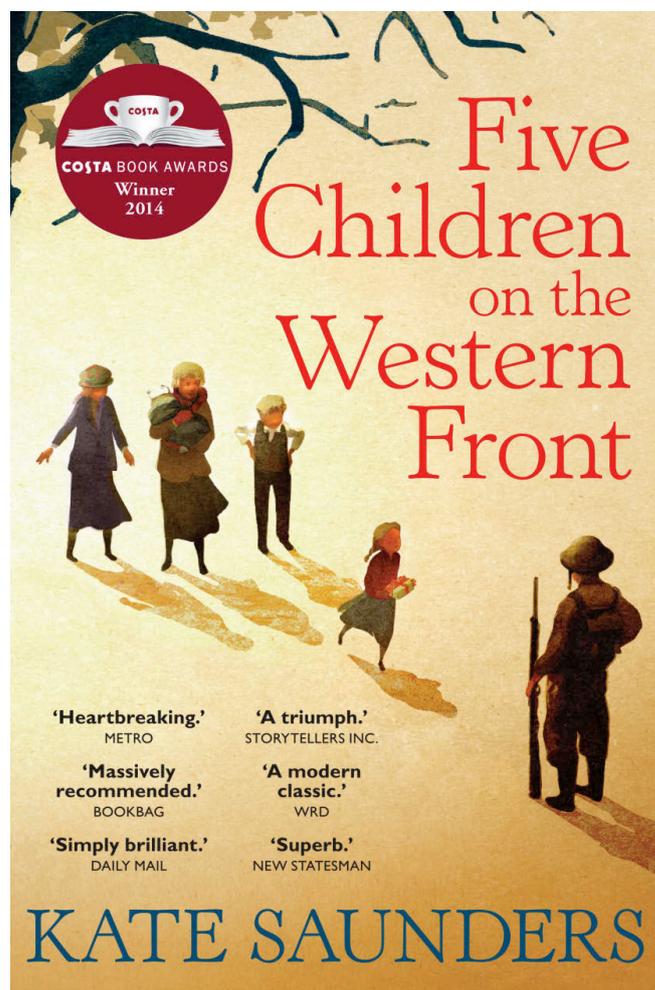
The writer Julian Barnes, with whom Saunders has a long-standing friendship, passed on something he was given when [his wife] Pat died: 'that nature is exact in the matter. It hurts exactly as much as it's worth, and if it wasn't worth anything then it wouldn't hurt, and that was helpful because it dignifies what you're going through. Yes, this is important, it's worth everything, I'm grieving for my son, and it's worth everything in the whole f**king world, that's how important

it is, and that - it's not a comfort because there isn't one, but it gives you a dignity.'

That is why, she adds, the Victorian mourning system worked, because it meant people knew how to react. 'I'm wearing black for a year and a day because my heart is broken and that's obvious. But mind you, if you were going out to a country house you had to take your mourning with you just in case somebody died. Somehow you had to know if it was full mourning or half. And you had to appear at breakfast in your correct mourning - it was awful. That was your luggage. Like a newsreader.'

Death is weird and frightening, but there's nothing you can do about it.

'Death is weird and frightening, but there's nothing you can do about it,' she finishes. And with that glint in her eye, she adds: 'Imagine if I put that on the cover - it would be so lovely.'



The Land of Neverendings is published by Faber & Faber, 978-0-5713-1084-5, £10.99 hbk

Five Children on the Western Front, Faber & Faber, 978-0-5713-2318-0, £6.99 pbk

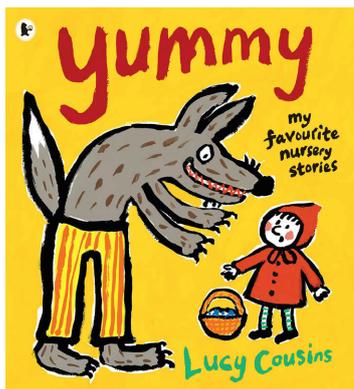


Philip Womack is an author and critic. His books include **The Double Axe** and the **Darkening Path** trilogy. He is crowdfunding his new novel **The Arrow of Apollo**, with Unbound.

Ten of the Best Fairy Tale Collections for Children

Ann Lazim chooses.

I've always been fascinated by folk and fairy tales and how similar stories appear across countries and cultures. The collections described here are beautifully produced volumes well worth sharing in the home and classroom and, importantly, read aloud well, reaching back to origins in oral tradition. A 'fairy tale ending' doesn't always mean they lived happily ever after!

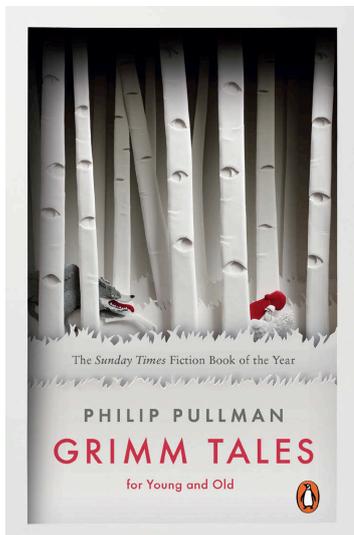


Yummy: My Favourite Nursery Stories

Lucy Cousins, Walker, 9781406328721, £12.99pbk

My preferred collection for young children. Lucy Cousins' signature style, using bold colours with stalwart figures strongly outlined in black, is well suited to illustrating traditional tales, here retold in spare and straightforward language. The eight stories include *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *Henny*

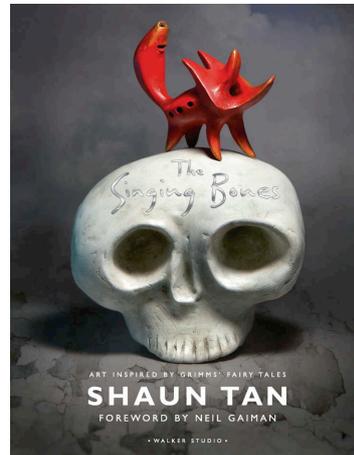
and *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Sensitive adults beware graphic moments such as the wolf swallowing Little Red Riding Hood's Grandmother and the hunter chopping off his head, but most children will relish them.



Grimm Tales: For Young and Old

Philip Pullman, Penguin Classics, 9780141442228, £9.99pbk

Philip Pullman's versions of fifty of the tales collected by the Brothers Grimm were not published specifically for children but then traditional tales were generally not first told with child audiences in mind. This is a perfect book for a family or a teacher to own and share with young people. The realisation that similar stories exist across cultures, evidenced by the notes appended to each tale, may capture the imaginations of older children, resulting in a lifelong interest in folk and fairy tales.

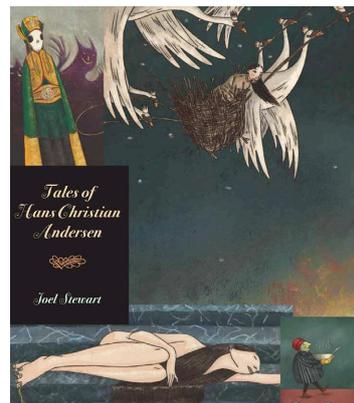


The Singing Bones

Shaun Tan, Walker Studio, 9781406370669, £19.99hbk

The dark side of Grimm's tales is evoked by photographs of stunning sculptures illustrating significant moments from the stories with accompanying related text on the opposite page. A summary of each complete story can be found at the end of the book along with further recommended reading lists. The sculptures make readers ponder why Shaun Tan might have chosen to depict this particular moment in the story, for example Cinderella is

shown in the opening to a hearth at the bottom of a chimney, a golden head with her eyes closed.

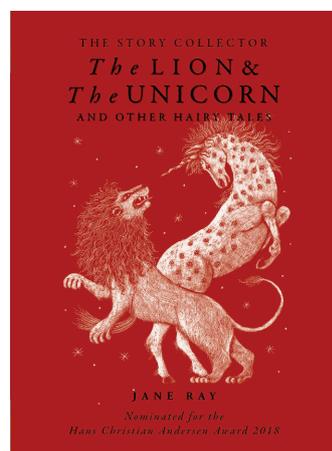


Tales of Hans Christian Andersen

Hans Christian Andersen, illustrated by Joel Stewart, translated and introduced by Naomi Lewis, Walker, 9781406317466, £9.99pbk

This compendium of thirteen of Andersen's fairy tales includes most of his best known, such as Gerda's search for her lost playmate in *The Snow Queen* and the circular journey of *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*. Each story is prefaced

by fascinating information about its origin and place within Andersen's work. The subtle illustrations are a mix of muted colours and small sepia vignettes and are well suited to the light and dark of the tales.



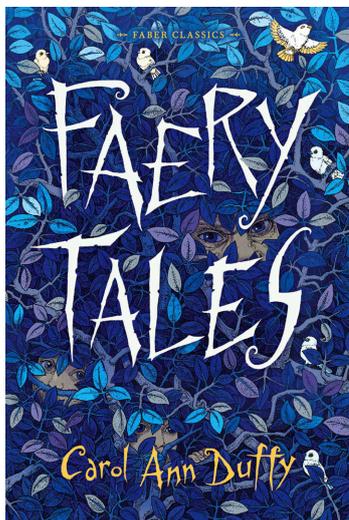
The Lion & The Unicorn and Other Hairy Tales

Jane Ray, Boxer Books, 9781910716502, £15.99pbk

One of three exquisite collections of beastly tales by Jane Ray in which she has inhabited and interpreted several stories and expressed the retellings in words and pictures. Included is *The Singing Ringing Tree*. I've discovered that many people of my age have vivid memories of the East German TV film of this story! Jane Ray has also illustrated Berlie Doherty's **Classic Fairy Tales**

(Walker 9781406365962, £14.99hbk), portraying characters familiar from fairy tales mostly taken from Western European tradition with a variety of skin hues

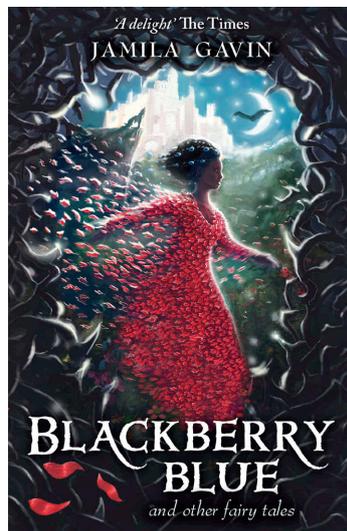
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Faery Tales

Carol Ann Duffy, illustrated by Tomislav Tomic, Faber & Faber, 9780571314270, £20hbk

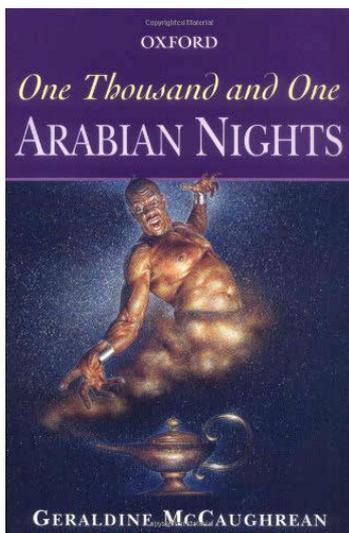
Carol Ann Duffy uses colloquial everyday language for many of her retellings, making them great to read aloud and harking back to the oral tradition from whence many of them came. Many of the stories emanate from the Brothers Grimm but there are also nods to the literary French tales (*Blue Beard*, *Beauty and the Beast*) and Andersen (*The Emperor's New Clothes*) and some of her own stories (*The Stolen Childhood*, *The Lost Happy Endings* and others) drawing on fairy tale elements are also included.



Blackberry Blue and Other Fairy Tales

Jamila Gavin, illustrated by Richard Collingridge, Tamarind, 978-1848531079, £6.99

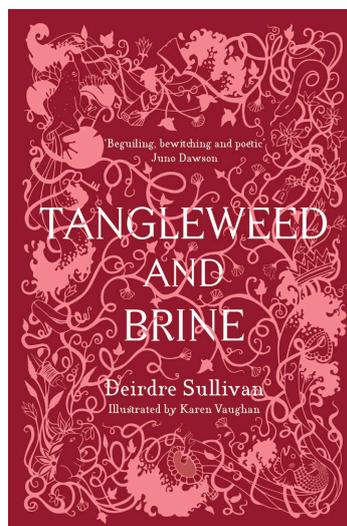
Jamila Gavin has fashioned her own set of fairy tales, drawing principally on the European traditions with which she grew up. With the expressed aim of increased inclusivity, she has created characters who are people of colour. For example, the heroine of the title story, which has elements of the Cinderella variant *Mossycoat*, has 'skin as black as midnight' and 'lips like crushed damsons'. None of the stories is a direct retelling of a traditional story but each incorporates tropes recognisable from folklore and fairy tale.



One Thousand and One Arabian Nights

Geraldine McCaughrean, illustrated by Rosamund Fowler, Oxford University Press, 9780192750136, £8.99pbk

A selection of tales from the **Arabian Nights**, stories that have had a huge influence on European wonder tales. The framework of Shahrazad telling these stories to her husband King Shahrivar in order to postpone her death draws you on to read just one more story. They include *Sindbad*, *Alibaba* and *Ala al-Din* and many other less well known stories. Children will recognise the familiar themes such as heroic quests and voyages, magical objects and transformations, and the struggle between good and evil.

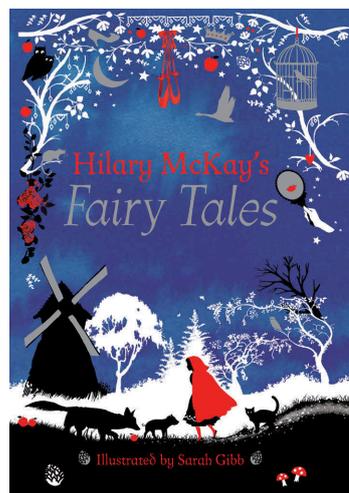


Tangleweed and Brine

Deirdre Sullivan, illustrated by Karen Vaughan, Little Island, 978-1910411926, £12.99hbk

Deirdre Sullivan recreates fairy tales for young adults in a manner that draws on the earthy and salty language of Angela Carter and is reminiscent of the truncated sentences of her countrywoman Eimear McBride. Birth, babies and burgeoning sexuality are very present as the young women familiar to us from traditional stories emerge into adulthood. Red Riding Hood tells of her life now she is 'The Woodcutter's Bride', remembering 'When I was a small girl something happened

to me in the forest.' Many stories are in the second person, leaving room for the reader to work out who is speaking and who is being addressed.



Fairy Tales

Hilary McKay, illustrated by Sarah Gibb, Macmillan, 9781447292296, £9.99hbk

Hilary McKay has taken ten well-known fairy tales and given them a fresh twist by retelling them from a variety of viewpoints, often framing them in unexpected ways. The youthful protagonists of traditional tales are turned into parents and grandparents so if you ever wondered what happened following the 'happy ever after' you may find some suggested answers here.



Ann Lazim is Literature and Library Development Manager at the **Centre for Literacy in Primary Education** in London which houses a large collection of traditional tales in its reference library www.clpe.org.uk

Happy Ever After: an interview with Hilary McKay

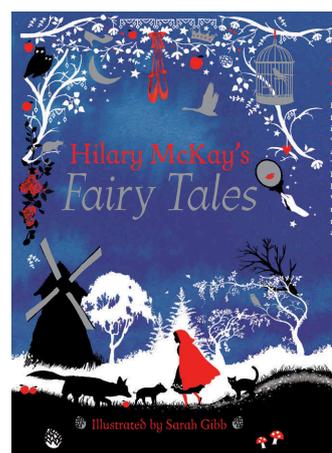
Hilary McKay's new book is a sparkling collection of fairy tales, retold with all her trademark liveliness, insight and compassion. She's already proved her ability to breathe new life into a familiar story with a wonderful sequel to **A Little Princess, Wishing for Tomorrow**, and her own novels, from **The Exiles** to the **Casson family saga** and **Binny** series have touches of magic and fairy tale throughout. No wonder then that when Macmillan asked her if she would like to do some fairy tale retellings, it 'seemed like being invited on holiday'. She said yes right away.



'I think I knew fairy tales before I knew books', Hilary says. 'I was the oldest of four children and my father was a great storyteller. As a child it seemed I never saw him without a baby on his knee. He would say "Once upon a time ..." and begin a fairy tale. The child would fall asleep after two minutes but he would always wind the story onto the end. So I suppose I had fairy tales from before I could speak, we all did.' These days Hilary lives in Derbyshire, in the heart of what she describes as 'fairy tale landscape'. 'I've got forest all around and I work for the Wildlife Trust so am in ancient woodlands a lot of the time, usually on my own or with the dog. You hear it go quiet in the evening or you hear the alarm calls calling off around you, and you think to yourself "There's something here!" But what is here is you, you are the scary thing in the wood. It's easy to let your imagination go.'

How did she choose the ten fairy tales that are included in the book? 'I found it quite difficult. I didn't want tales by anybody named, Hans Christian Andersen for example, and I wanted to stick to western European fairy tales, to what was familiar. I didn't want anything too 'Disneyfied' if I could help it. And then I asked my friends what they liked too so there are one or two that I would not have chosen for myself: *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*, which I found very hard to do, with all those princesses and the chopping off of heads. I put my own favourites in: I put *Rumpelstiltskin* in and *The Swan Brothers*.'

Readers of Hilary's collection will be struck by the very fresh approach she brings to the stories, telling them from unusual viewpoints,



revisiting the protagonists later in their lives. In her version of *Rumpelstiltskin* for example, we experience the story from Rumpelstiltskin's point of view: she makes him a hob, 'Root dark, reed thin, perhaps half the height of a man, perhaps less. A plain, scuttling hob with a husky, piping voice', and in her version, hob and child are together at the end of the story. 'I always thought he was very badly treated, and that he might not have been evil, and he wasn't in my story. After all the adults in the story aren't very admirable – the king for

example, who takes the miller's daughter he's not really a decent character, taking in a young girl like that for money, and she was very naïve. I thought the child would be as well off with the hob as anybody else so I changed it a little bit and I gave him a voice.'

As for *The Pied Piper*: 'I told the story through the true villain' she says: 'The one who caused all the trouble though he always seems to get away with it in every retelling. He got away with it in mine but I hope his conscience pricked him ...'. Her version of *The Swan Brothers* is from the point of view of the youngest brother who was left with the swan wing: 'I thought he would always have a yearning for flight again'. Her *Rapunzel* is extremely moving: Rapunzel now grown up, settled with her prince and mother to two happy children, still feels a prisoner of the tower until a little bird – a yellowhammer – shows her the way to freedom, 'And so then they all lived happily. Ever after.'

Why does she think fairy stories remain so powerful? 'I think because they are such clear structures. A while back my daughter rang up from university and she said "I've changed my name on Facebook, I'm using grandma's name for a little while. I met a wolf in the forest" – actually she said I met a man in a nightclub – "and I should never have told him my name." I thought well, you did what Red Riding Hood did and Rumpelstiltskin mixed together, you gave your name away and then wished you hadn't and tried to cover your tracks; Wolf was always a two legged wolf even from the beginning. So yes, I think they're very relevant, we still have children who don't have enough to eat even though they're not abandoned in the forest (though I think our government almost would). Hansel and Gretel were taken away because there was not enough food in the house, it was disgraceful; in my version Gretel was still trying to make sense of the shock of it all but I think there are children today who could relate to that.'

'A lot of my own pleasure went into these stories I have to say. The thing about fairy tales is that they give you a very clear map, you can retrace the journey and find all sorts of things along the way and that's what I let myself do.' There's a huge amount of pleasure for readers in this collection too, and it deserves a place on every bookshelf.

Hilary McKay's Fairy Tales is published by Macmillan Children's Books, 978 1 4472 9228 9, £12.99. Illustrations throughout by Sarah Gibb.

Truly Two

Catherine MacPhail explains why Robert Louis Stevenson's **Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde** exert such a strong influence on her.



It all began with an April Fool on Facebook. It was at the time when books about young Sherlock Holmes, and young James Bonds were coming out, and I posted that I had been asked to write a book about young Henry Jekyll.

To my surprise, no one realised it was an April Fool. Everyone thought it was a great idea. And that is when I knew

that this idea had been hiding away, inside my head, for a long time.

I love Robert Louis Stevenson, he is one of my writing heroes, and I especially love **The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde** and the story behind it. It came to Stevenson in a dream. He woke up and told his wife he had dreamt 'a fine bogey tale'. I love that, 'a fine bogey tale', and what is Edward Hyde if he is not the bogeyman?

I discovered there were other books that came from nightmares. Bram Stoker dreamed of a vampire and he wrote **Dracula**. Mary Shelley had a nightmare about a man coming to life and **Frankenstein** was born. And even my humble self had a recurring nightmare as a child about a fetch taking over my life and from that came **Another Me**. I have always been fascinated by doubles.

Of course, the story is so famous, we all know the ending, but can you imagine how thrilling it must have been on first reading this book? Turning the pages, trying to figure out why a respectable doctor was giving this monstrous man the run of his house, this man who has 'Satan's signature on his face'? Why has Jekyll left everything to him in his will? His friends think he must be being blackmailed, but what dark history could such a respectable doctor have in his past? And then that twist of an ending when the reader finally learns the truth, that Jekyll and Hyde are one and the same. That man is not 'truly one, but truly two'. How clever is that final chapter? The letter from Jekyll that is both a confession to a murder, the murder of Edward Hyde, and a suicide note, because in order to kill Hyde, Jekyll must kill himself.

The book came out in 1886, and was called a chiller and a shocker, and when only two years later the Jack the Ripper murders began people thought the Ripper had been inspired by this book. At the same time the play of the book was running in London and the main actor was almost arrested as the Ripper.

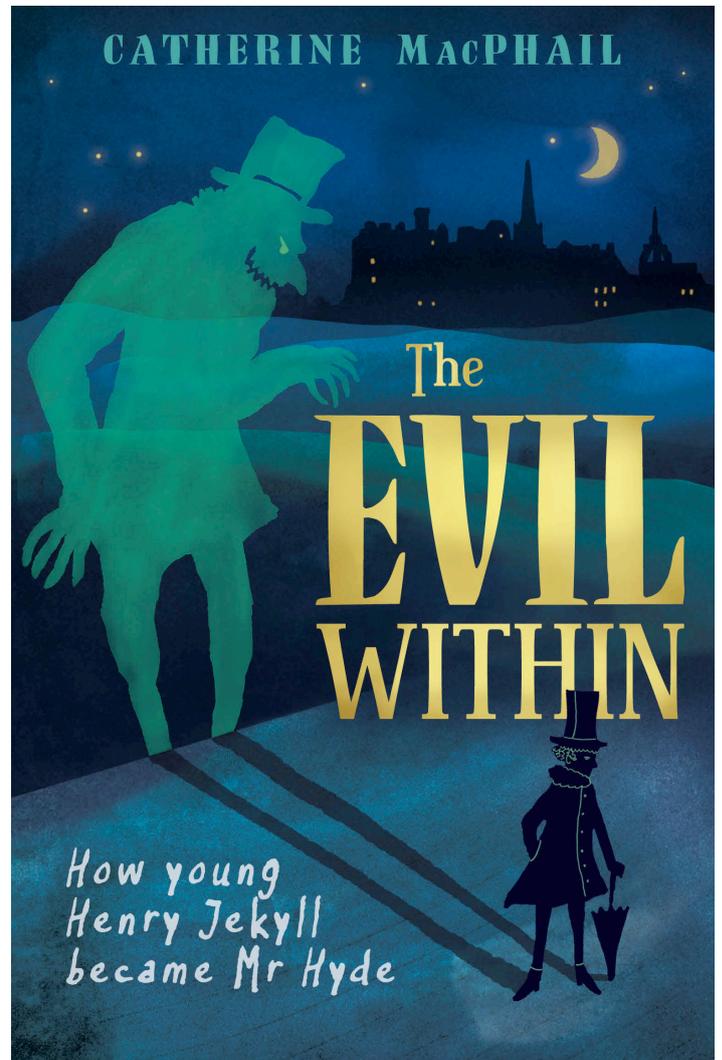
Stevenson's book has inspired plays, films, television series and is as topical today as it ever was. I wanted to make my book a worthy successor. Stevenson wrote **The Strange Case** in three days, and I decided I would write **The Evil Within** in three days too, and keep as close as I could to his original word count.

I re-read the book, looking for clues about Jekyll's youth. And there are plenty there.

'He was wild when he was young,' but just how wild was he?

Utterston knows that Jekyll has left everything to Hyde in his will and he wonders. 'I thought it was madness... now I begin to fear it is disgrace.' But what kind of disgrace?

Jekyll fears that, 'to cast in my lot with Jekyll was to die to those appetites I had long secretly indulged...'. For how long? He must have suspected he had this evil inside him. He also says that in order to carry his head high he had 'concealed my pleasures... and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame.'

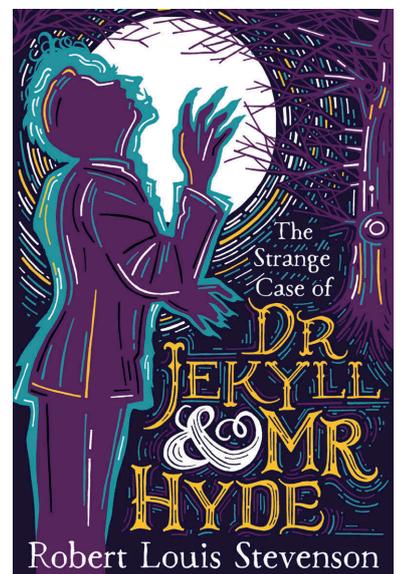


But this was the most telling clue for me: 'My devil had been long caged. He came out roaring.' How young was he when he first caged that devil?

So my story begins in Edinburgh when Henry Jekyll is fourteen. Edinburgh, a deliberate choice, because in a way, Edinburgh is also 'truly two'. It has the wide elegant streets of the New Town with its Georgian terraces and tree lined boulevards, and the Old Town with its narrow closes and cobbled alleys and wynds, and always the Castle looming over it. The creature stalks the Old Town by night, and in the morning young Henry wakes up to nightmares he does not understand. When he learns the truth, he does his best to right a wrong, and determines to conceal forever this other part of him, conceal it so deep within him he will forget it ever existed.

I am so proud of this book, and very grateful to Barrington Stoke for giving me the chance to bring it to life. I only hope I have done justice to the wonderful original.

The Evil Within is published by Barrington Stoke, 978-1-7811-2587-8, £6.99pbk. Barrington Stoke have also published a dyslexia friendly version of **The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde**, using a specially-designed font, increased spacing and tinted paper, 978-1-7811-2740-7, £7.99 pbk



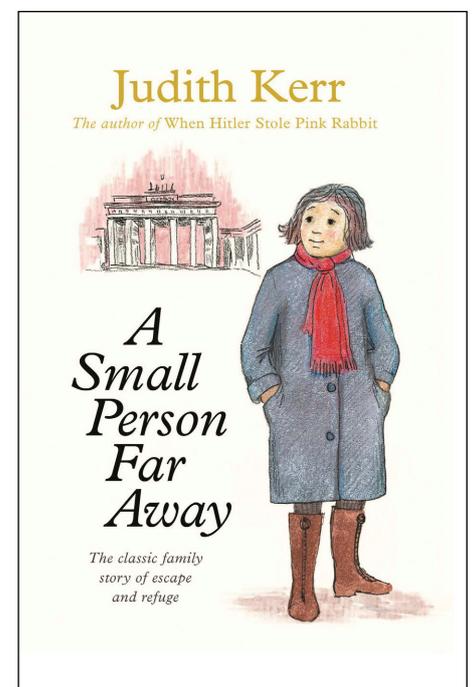
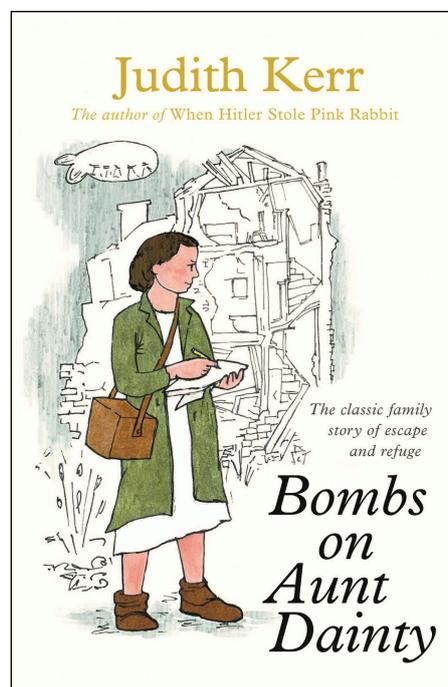
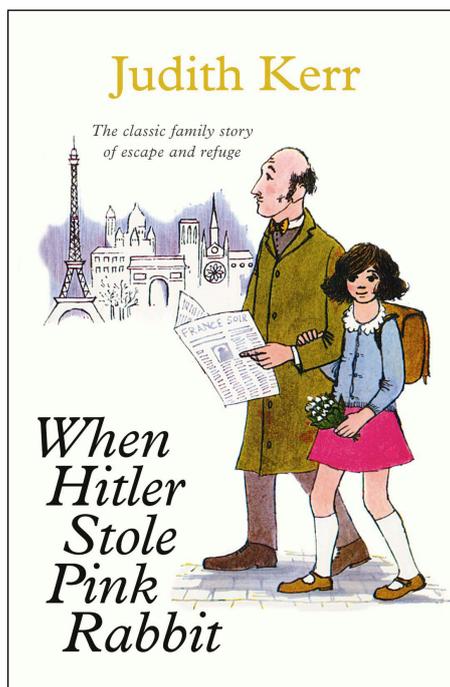
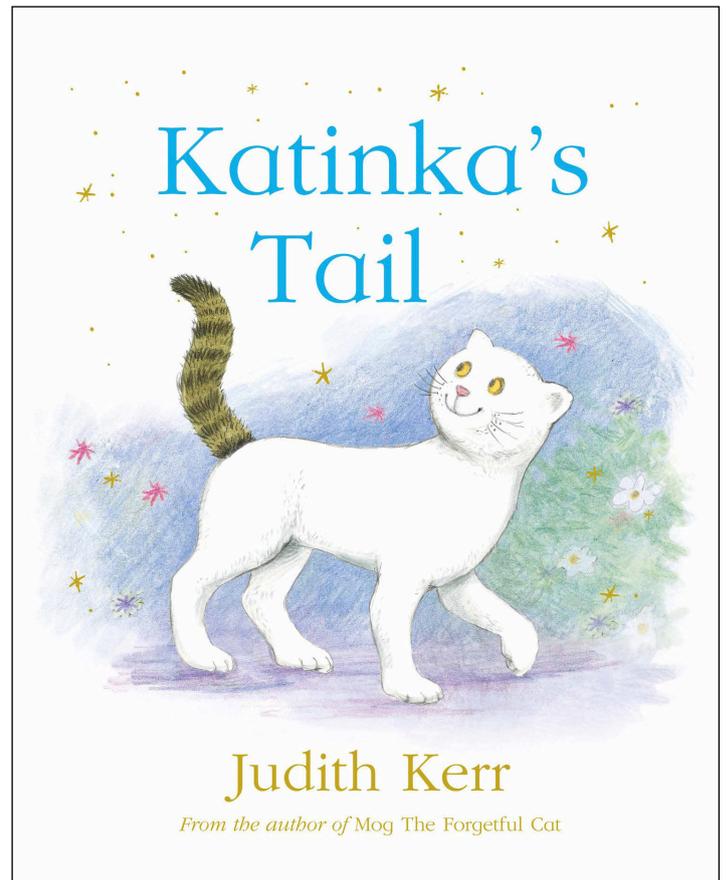
A Talent for Happiness: Judith Kerr interviewed by Nicholas Tucker

Just turned 94, **Judith Kerr** is still full of ideas for stories as **Nicholas Tucker** discovered when he interviewed her for **Books for Keeps**.

I am sitting in the drawing room of a pretty suburban house opposite Barnes Common in London. My hostess is the children's author and illustrator Judith Kerr. Recently celebrating her 94th birthday, she is as spry as ever, full of opinions, still keeping up with everything and unflinchingly positive. She can even find it in herself now to welcome her family's forced exile from Germany way back in 1933: *My brother and I always agreed that our childhood in Switzerland, France and finally Britain worked out much better for us than if Hitler had never happened. We loved going to all these different schools and learning other languages.*

The family's adventures are recorded in her autobiographical trilogy **When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit**, **Bombs on Aunt Dainty** (formerly **The Other Way Round**) and **A Small Person Far Away**. Published over forty years ago, they have recently been re-issued in paperbacks sporting smart new covers illustrated by the author. They read as well as ever.

I am with her to discuss her latest picture book, **Katinka's Tail**, published by HarperCollins in a sumptuous hardback edition. Katinka is Judith's cat, otherwise white except for the existence of her tabby tail. Her various party tricks make up the bulk of this utterly charming book.





I draw back my bedroom curtain in the morning and there she is sitting on the window sill having climbed up the wisteria branches on the wall. Then she has this joke she invented where she lies on the table and then let's herself slowly slip off onto the floor. She refined this to the extent that when she hears me coming in she is actually falling off the moment I open the door.

But although always drawn with a human smile Katinka is also still very much a cat. *She brings me mice she catches and leaves them on the kitchen floor as a gift. I always say "Oh, how lovely, thank you!" then throw the bodies away on the common when she is not watching. There are also the corpses of baby birds as well, which I find harder to put up with, and once a huge rat that she managed to kill.*

From her early depiction of the famously intrusive and greedy tiger who came to tea, Judith has always avoided sentimentality

Neither the rat nor the birds appear in the book, but the corpses of mice, either whole or half eaten, are there for all to see. From her early depiction of the famously intrusive and greedy tiger who came to tea, Judith has always avoided sentimentality. Her picture book **Goodbye, Mog** describes the peaceful death of a much loved cat who had after appearing in many other books finally become 'dead tired.' Small children, so often protected from depictions of death in their books, seem to have liked this title as much as any. The fact that there is a new kitten in the story who takes over where Mog leaves off might also have helped.

Her present picture book once again cleverly mixes everyday reality with fantasy, marked this time in the illustrations by the sudden appearance of tiny flecks of gold. These surround Katinka and her owner as they finish up flying among the stars along with hosts of animals. The result of much experimentation and not a little expense in the HarperCollins art department, these gold showers look as realistic as the genuine article. Judith, who appears as herself in the book, is finally shown returning to her own bed. No longer sprayed with gold she is still clutching the box of paper handkerchiefs that

accompanied her to the moon. She is now convinced that this journey was all a dream. But the last picture, with Katinka beaming at the open window with her tail still gold-spangled, introduces just that element of mystery that children like to puzzle over after a favourite book comes to its end.

Judith uses coloured inks first for her picture outlines and then turns to crayons to complete the effect. The illustrations that result are gentle and affectionate. Humour is always to the fore as she and Katinka share breakfast together on the same table and later watch television in amiable harmony. The whole project took her a year to complete. So what's next?

A talent for happiness

Normally when I finish something I say 'Oh good! I can take some time off now.' Then after a fortnight or so I start asking myself, 'What am I doing?' It normally takes me a while to think of the next thing but this time it didn't, and I am more than half way through a new picture book now. And I've thought of the next one after that as well.

She once described her father, the distinguished German writer and satirist Alfred Kerr, as having a talent for happiness. The same could equally be said of Judith. She shares this happiness with others through her many picture books. As she put it to me herself, *"I think the world is incredibly beautiful and I have always loved looking at everything."* The same spirit shines out on every page of this latest book, as indeed it does in all her other work.

Katinka's Tail is published by HarperCollins Children's Books, 978-0-0082-5529-9, £12.99 hbk



Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

Windows into illustration: Ehsan Abdollahi

Ehsan Abdollahi is an acclaimed illustrator and animator from Iran whose books have been widely celebrated in the UK. Ehsan illustrated **A Bottle of Happiness** by Pippa Goodhart, the first of Tiny Owl Publishing's intercultural projects. He discusses it here.

A Bottle of Happiness was the first book I worked on with a non-Iranian author. When the publisher first sent me the translation of the work, I read the story over and over again. I was surprised to see how close our cultures are. I was keen to start working on it as soon as I could.

My drawing style in this book was very simple. I just took a pencil and I drew. I feel like there is such a pure feeling in pencil drawings, similar to the atmosphere in the story, and I wanted to put that feeling in the book. I used watercolour for the characters so I could paint transparent colours layer by layer onto the pencil drawings. That way the colour wouldn't cover the pencil lines completely. (The subject was about love and peace, and the purest material to use was watercolour, I thought.)

I wanted the illustrations to represent all ethnicities so I decided not to use any colour for the characters' skin and just leave the colour of the paper. The dress style for the people in the story is also a combination of different global dresses. However, I was born in south of Iran and I think this influenced me to use bright colours, because the people of south Iran wear dresses with patterns and bright coloured fabrics. If you look at the book closely, you'll see I've



also used my fingerprints on the dresses. It gives me a feeling that they are my close friends and that they are part of me.

The next thing I had to consider was how to show the poverty of one town in contrast with the wealth of the other. Although the poorer people had less money, they were happy and they saw the world beautifully. So, I made their clothing beautiful but with more patches of fabric. I also included many dandelions in the poor people's village, and on Pim's hat. Dandelions are a symbol of hope and happiness in Persian culture and you can see them spread into the wealthy village towards the end of the book.

When the characters were illustrated and coloured, I scanned them. It was time to put them all together in the story. I wanted a simple background that wouldn't detract from the characters so I used strong colours with watercolour drops.

I wanted the background colour to give a feeling for each village so I used a purplish grey for the wealthy village, and a strong orange for the poorer but happier village. I thought this was a good choice, until I got to the spread where both people came together. This spread couldn't be grey or orange. It needed a stronger colour, like love: red. I thought only red could show the feeling of that moment.

It was a very special experience working with Pippa Goodhart. I loved creating a book that crossed national and cultural boundaries, and that celebrated people coming together from different sides of the mountain.



A Bottle of Happiness is published by Tiny Owl, 978-1-9103-2820-0, £12.99 hbk and 978-1-9103-2826-2, £7.99 pbk (out 9 January 2018)

In 2018, Tiny Owl will publish Ehsan's next book **Thinker: My Puppy Poet and Me** by the acclaimed African-American poet Eloise Greenfield.

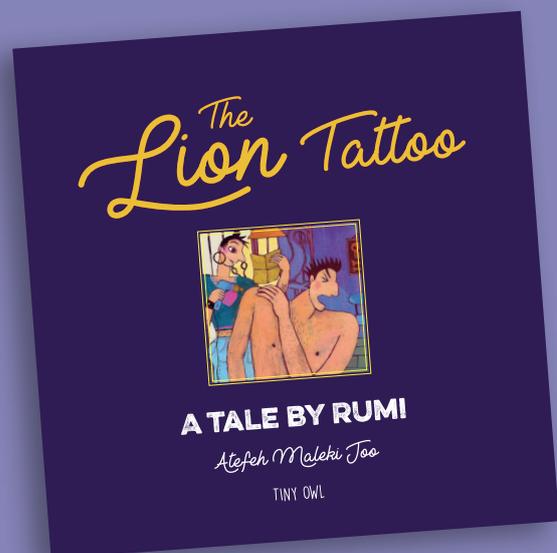
Find out more about their intercultural projects at www.tinyowl.co.uk



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TINY OWL

Two Children Tell Meeting Monsters

In the latest of her series describing children's early responses to stories and language, **Virginia Lowe** remembers her son Nick's first encounters with monsters.

When Rebecca and Nick were born, in the seventies, there was little understanding of the pleasure children obtain from monsters. **Sesame Street**, with Oscar the Grouch and the others, was still quite new on television. My mother was puzzled: Why do you read your beautiful children about such ugly creatures? she asked of Sendak's **Where the Wild Things Are**.

In fact, neither child showed any fear of Sendak's benign, not to say goofy-looking, Wild Things, with Max always (except on one turning) completely in control. In fact, Rebecca used to tell herself different stories to the pictures, starting from the back. One I overheard her telling the infant Nick at 3y7m it was about the Wild Things bouncing on their beds, and 'Mothers watch and criticize them as they fight and hit.'

Nick, though a child with many more fears, never displayed any discomfort either. But at 2y6m we revived **Harry the Dirty Dog** (Graham/Zion) which he hadn't heard for several months. After the first reading, he asked for it 'again' (as was usual) but 'don't read the bad part'. I couldn't see what would be frightening in this tale of a white dog with black spots becoming a black dog with white spots. 'What bad part?' I asked him, and his reply was 'where they say there's a strange dog in the yard'. Then I realised that the thought that you could run away from home, get dirty, and not be recognised by your family, was much more frightening than any monster, and not only that, he felt within the bounds of possibility as well.

The moral is that some child will find some picture frightening, but only the parent will be able to predict which ones. For instance, **Samuel Whiskers** was Rebecca's favourite Potter for years, but Anna Crago (in **Prelude to Literacy**, Crago) was afraid of it because of the spider when Tom Kitten is shut in the attic.

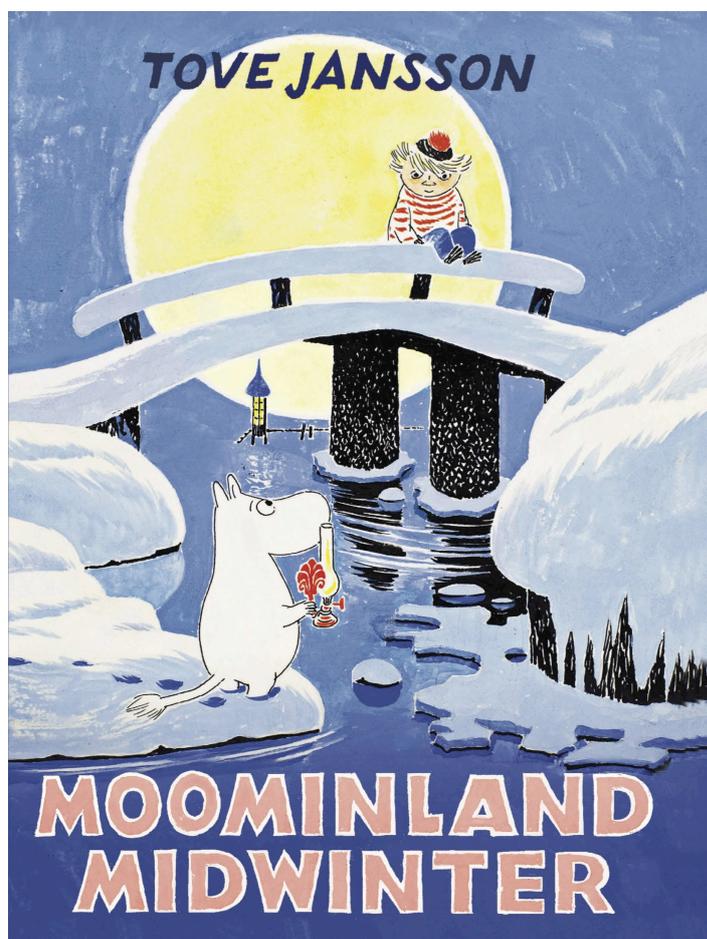
When Nick was 2y3m, I took him, with Rebecca 5y6m and a friend Lucy (about 3y6m) to the film of **The Wizard of Oz**. Lucy's mother assured me that she had seen it on TV with no anxiety, but as soon as Toto was not in the picture, she collapsed against me, asking 'where's the dog?' Nick was on my lap throughout. When the Wicked Witch of the West turned up, I put a reassuring hand on Rebecca's, cuddled Lucy against me, and Nick took one look at the screen and dived for my sweater. From there on, throughout the scene, he alternated a mouthful of breast milk with a quick glance at the screen. 'He's having a boob' rang Lucy's piercing voice throughout the cinema. Discussing it in the car afterwards, Rebecca's main interest was whether they could have used playdough to make the witch's nose so long.

But from there on, Nick was afraid of many things, mainly in books. We had **Some Things are Scary** (Heide) and he started saying 'he yoves me' to the lion and the pirate and 'dat nice one' to the dragon, cuddling the page, behaviour he had not evidenced before.

He was able to articulate 'me scared of witch – witches in books' to Hoffman's **Rapunzel** (with no visual connection between Rapunzel's witch and Oz's one).

He used to enjoy John's dramatic readings of 'the great rough voice' of the Father Bear in Stobbs' version of **The Three Bears**, and his crying voice in **The Elephant and the Bad Baby** (Vipont/Briggs). Now he would turn and cuddle the reader consolingly, or refuse to hear **The Three Bears**. **N**: Cos when he gruffs I'm scared, you see.

Two months later this had changed again with 'I yove him' to pictures of lions and witches and spiders and dinosaurs. But at this age he began rejecting titles for a different reason. **N**: Me no like sad



ones – to **Emma Quite Contrary** (Wolde) where there is no threat of punishment from the parent, or refusing to let me even open the page where Tabitha Twitchet comes down on her children who have spoiled their best clothes in Tom Kitten.

By 2y8m he had found a new strategy – denying the reality of the scary character. To Rebecca's teasing. **R**: It's a skeleton! It will get you. **N**: It's not real. It's stuck down. At 4y2m, at his first encounter with the threatening Groke (in **Moominland Midwinter**, Jansson) he asked if she was always awake, and went to find another book chanting **N**: We don't know and we don't know, cos we've never seen one and there's nothing real about them.

By 4y3m he was asking for 'scary ones' in books of myths and legends, and managed to listen to all of **Comet in Moominland** – by far the most frightening book he had encountered. As an adult he has displayed courage both as a paramedic and saving whales on the *Sea Shepherd*.

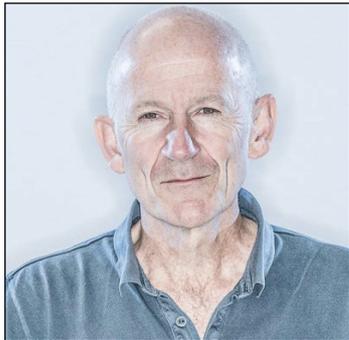
Moominland Midwinter Special Collectors' Edition (978-1908745668), Tove Jansson, is published by Sort of Books, £10.99



Dr Virginia Lowe lives in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. She is the proprietor of **Create a Kids' Book**, a manuscript assessment agency, which also runs regular workshops, interactive writing e-courses, mentorships and produces a regular free e-bulletin on writing for children and children's literature generally. See www.createakidsbook.com.au for further details. Her book, **Stories, Pictures and Reality: Two Children Tell** (2007) is published by Routledge (978-0-4153-9724-7, £29.99 p/bk).

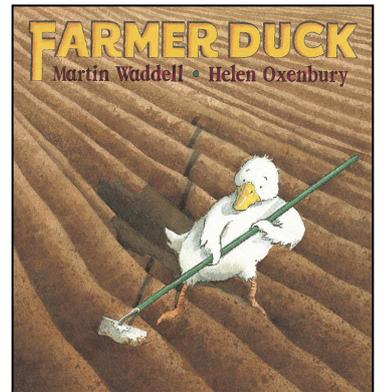
I wish I'd written...

Jonathan Meres marvels at the impact of a picture book classic.



Jonathan Meres's new book, **Mint Choc Chip at the Market Cafe** (978-1-7811-2756-8) is published by Barrington Stoke, £6.99 pbk.

My first two published books, were picture books. The next thirty-odd, weren't. I'd like to write another, one day. But it's not nearly as easy as some people might think. When you're writing a longer book of say, thirty thousand words, you can go off on the odd tangent, or detour. But with a picture book, you have just five hundred words or so, to tell an entire story. Every single one of them has to count. Because with any luck, that book will be read over and over again. Not only by children, but by grown-ups reading to children. Each word will be learned off by heart. Woe betide the grown-up who gets one wrong, or tries to skip to the end, hoping the child has fallen asleep. And for that reason, the book I wish I'd written, is any of the wonderful picture books I read to my own children when they were little. We had so many favourites. But if I had to pick just one, it would have to be **Farmer Duck**, by Martin Waddell, gorgeously illustrated by Helen Oxenbury. "How goes the work?" called the farmer. The duck answered, "Quack!" Brilliant. George Orwell eat your heart out.



Farmer Duck (978-1-4063-6573-3) by Martin Waddell, illus Helen Oxenbury is published by Walker Books, £6.99.

Good Reads

Our Good Reads were chosen by young people at the **Highfield Primary School, Enfield** and are all poetry anthologies. Thanks to the pupils and to the school's poet-in-residence **Cheryl Moskowitz**

Ladder to the Moon

Maya Soetoro-Ng, illustrated by Yuyi Morales, Walker Books, 978-1-4063-3773-0, £5.99

Suhaila is a little girl like me. Her grandma Annie passed away but wanted to see her granddaughter one last time so she made a golden shiny ladder in the sky and climbed down until she reached Suhaila's house on Earth. Grandma Annie invited Suhaila on an adventure and Suhaila agreed. They climbed up all the way to the sparkly, silver moon and when they looked down they saw terrible things happening. They saw a flood, schools and homes washing away, but the children and mummies stayed safe because of Suhaila and her grandma who shared everything they had and gave them sweet moon dew to drink. From the moon Suhaila could see her shadow on earth and knew she would take power from the moon back with her when she had to go.

I used to wish that the earth could be our moon so we could gaze at all the countries and remember them in our heads, and learn something about all of the people in the world.

What makes the book special for me is how you can tell from the pictures that the people are from different places. I think all families everywhere should read this book together.

Lily Hearn, Yr 2.

The Noisy Classroom

Ieva Flamingo illustrated by Vivianna Maria Stansislavska, translated from the Latvian by Žanete Vevere Pasqualini, Sara Smith and Richard O'Brien, The Emma Press, 978-1-9101-3982-0, £8.50 hbk

This book of poems is very interesting for me, Ieva Flamingo writes about so many subjects. It helps me with my language and to learn new words and information. Some pieces are funny and some are serious and moving. My favourite is "The Girl in the Wheelchair", especially the final lines:

*She is almost, almost exactly like me,
though it's easier for her to play the spellbound princess;
but you mustn't imagine she's trapped by a dragon;
or think that her wheelchair's a frightening fortress...*



Lily



Kristina



Saphira



Dilan

Ieva Flamingo is sensitive about people and relationships and also cares about the natural world. Her poetry helps us to see that computers and mobile phones aren't the most important things in life, you need nature and friendship too. I can't speak Latvian so I am happy these poems have been translated otherwise I wouldn't have known about them. My first languages are Greek and Albanian so I know how important it is to be able to translate good writing into a language people can understand.

I like writing my own poems and I write about people, and the world and what interests me just like Ieva Flamingo does. At the back of this book are suggestions for creating your own poems. I think I will try some.

Kristina Kola, Yr 6

Fortune's Bones – The Manumission Requiem

Marilyn Nelson, notes and annotations by Pamela Espeland, Front Street Books, 978-1-9324-2512-3, £11.99

We have been talking at school about Black History and learning about Harriet Tubman, who worked to free slaves, so this book is very interesting for me. It's beautifully illustrated with photos and paintings from history.

Fortune's Bones is more than a poetry book, it's a requiem (which means 'song for the dead') reminding us how black people in America were often born into slavery and treated wrong for their whole lives, then forgotten about when they died. The poet Marilyn Nelson saw this skeleton in a museum and wanted to find out about the man whose bones it was. He was a slave named Fortune, owned by a white doctor who kept the bones after Fortune died.

My favourite lines are from the poem 'Not My Bones':

*You can own someone's body | but the soul runs free.
It roams the night sky's | mute geometry.*

The poem tells us that who we are inside is more important than the body we live in.

The last verse in this poem begins,
Well, I woke up this morning just so glad to be free...
This book really inspired me and will make you appreciate your own freedom and care about those not so fortunate.

Saphira Elkici Yr 6

The Young Inferno

John Agard, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura, Frances Lincoln Books, 978-1-8478-0109-8

This book is one long poem, divided into 12 Cantos (like chapters). Based on **Dante's Inferno**, the story tells what happens to people after they die if they have done bad stuff but it is really a book about life and how we can learn from history.

A boy, let's call him The Boy Who Went to Hell, is led around by his teacher guide, the Greek storyteller, Aesop, who wrote all those fables! The poems contain bits of stories and characters I recognised (Shakespeare, Hitler, Henry the Eighth...) and things we already know about history. The fact that it's written as a poem, and rhymes, makes you want to read it more and the Japanese pictures kept my attention. I would recommend it for every child, even older people.

Also, reading this means you can impress adults that you know about **The Divine Comedy** the original poem by Dante that John Agard was inspired by. It's like a history lesson and would be good for teachers too. I read the book at school and liked it so much I asked my mum to buy me a copy for home.

Dilan Ahmed, Yr 6

New children's book exhibitions: a review feature

The first children's book illustrated by Quentin Blake was John Yeoman's **A Drink of Water** which came out in 1960. (It may have been preceded that year by **Come Here till I Tell You**, humorous texts by Patrick Campbell which Quentin had illustrated in the **Spectator**.) John, who was a friend of Quentin's, had concocted his stories so that the two of them might have something to offer a publisher and Faber took a chance on this unknown couple, printing Quentin's ten full-page drawings as three-colour separations.

The stories, which were invented or adapted animal fables were succinct and good for reading aloud, with some delectable phrasing:

"Fmoo, fmoo!" [roared the bear] at the top of his voice, which is, as you know, bear singing'.

'[The crane] didn't invite the heron to sit down with her as there wasn't enough room for all the legs...'

and the drawings, which also included some black and white vignettes in the text, made a perfect match. It was worthy start to the wonders that would follow.

As is the way of things however, **A Drink of Water** became lost from view and is now a rare book. The partnership though continued (Yeoman's little story of **The Boy who Sprouted Antlers** was the first successor a year later) and now, forty-seven years later, the Yeoman/Blake collaborations have achieved a total of some 29 titles. There may not be any magic in those numbers but you don't need round numbers or anniversaries as an excuse for celebrating so fruitful a partnership and this year it has been topped and tailed by a handsome reissue of the first book from Thames & Hudson (a newish name for children's book publishing) together with a brilliant addition to the canon as a special birthday present to Klaus Flugge and his Andersen Press.

This is **All the Year Round** whose joyous contents are made plain on the cover: *'Every month in rhyme, from spring to wintertime'* below the dancing figures of a be-scarfed chap with a sledge and a Spring bouquet-laden girl. Nothing could be simpler. Each month arrives on a recto with an unfinished verse stanza which is then completed as a kind of punch-line as you turn the leaf to the verso:-

August

I found a super bathing-place, concealed among the trees.

In Spring it looks delightful – but the water's fit to freeze.

I use it most in August (there's just me and several sheep)

The water's warm and tempting...

...

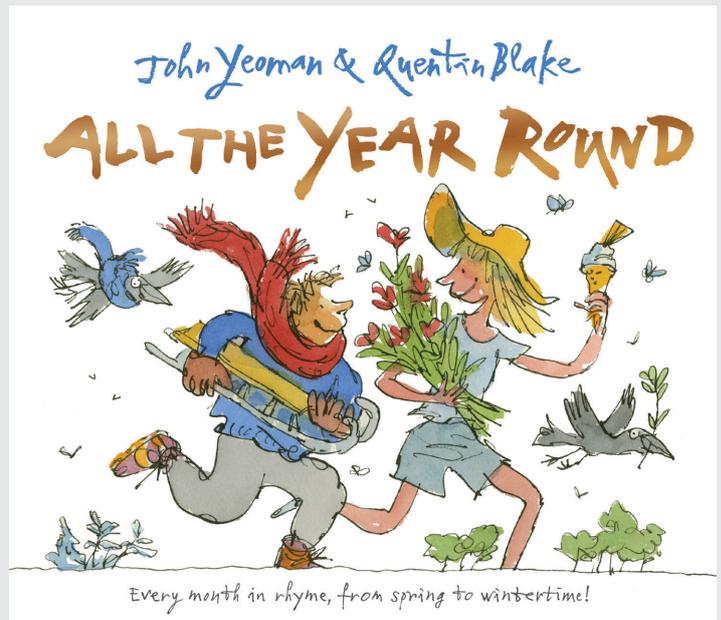
...But it's only ankle-deep.

And of course, every event is garnished with the parade of Blakean characters, all of whom I am sure we have met before, in equally frantic circumstances, colourful in their garb and bounding with energy. It would be a spoiler to give away the wonderful ending contrived for December.

By way of marking the return to print of the first book of the partnership



l to r: John Yeoman, Klaus Flugge and Quentin Blake



and the arrival of the latest, the Quentin Blake Gallery at the **House of Illustration** has mounted a small exhibition of select artwork from nine of the Yeoman/Blake books, together with some proofs of the first edition of **A Drink of Water**, and a lone, lorn paperback copy of **The Boy who Sprouted Antlers**. There are mostly four representative pictures from each selected book, some grouped within a single frame and all either in pen and ink or pen and watercolour on watercolour paper. It makes for a cheering but extremely puzzling display.

It may sound a tad obvious, but the art of illustration (which the House is founded to celebrate) presupposes the linking of graphic work to some functional purpose: a cartoon joke, an advertising slogan, a poem, or a told story. The latter purpose is particularly relevant in this case for the whole show is predicated on the long collaboration between a single writer and his friend the artist. What the visitor (who may know little of the background to the books of either) is confronted with is a set of images almost entirely unmoored from their fellows or from the authorial contents of the books which they are designed to accompany.

I have compiled what is a near enough complete list of the collaborative work ([follow the link](#)) and this will indicate the versatility of John Yeoman's inventive gifts which are sadly neither fully represented nor explained in the pictures on the walls. The illustrations from **Sixes and Sevens** which are shown with the typographic text pasted on ready for the printer at least give a clue that this is a jovial counting book but viewers must surely question what's going on elsewhere. Quite apart from the help that knowing the stories would give, ought not the customers be told that John Yeoman contrived a rhymed text for **The Fosskett Family Circus** to fit pictures already created to decorate the Northwick Park Hospital. Is it not of interest that the two pictures from **The Heron and the Crane**, one not used in the finished book, are illustrating a story first published in **A Drink of Water** (I have not been able to check if the text was in any way modified). An explanation also seems in order about the rather confused titling of **The Puffin Book of Impossible Records** (1975) from which all the watercolours are taken, one of which was dropped from the Macmillan edition of 1991 which was retitled **The World's Laziest Duck** and introduced two new pictures including that from which the new volume took its title (not in the exhibition).

The Improbable Records is, for me, one of the great books of the partnership and I was sorry that several others, such as **The Wild Washerwomen** (1979) or the magnificent **Do-it-Yourself House that Jack Built** (1994) were not present to add their visual delights to the show and thus, perhaps, propel visitors to find the books themselves with John Yeoman's vital texts. The show runs at the House till 4th March 2018 after which it is planned to move to larger venues with an expanded content. While one doesn't want to plaster the walls with possibly distracting notices, it would be lovely to know that some sort of hand-list could accompany it so that this great partnership was more fully celebrated.



And now for something different...

Tove Jansson: a European Touring Exhibition at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, 25 October 2017 - 28 January 2018

The universal association of Tove Jansson with the stories about the Moomins needs little explanation, but this display over six rooms at Dulwich provides an illuminating context for the intense creative life within which those works were created. Jansson was born into an artistic family in Helsinki in 1914, her father a sculptor and her mother a painter and graphic designer, so it is of little wonder that she too sought to become a painter, studying at schools in Stockholm, Paris, and Helsinki (although Finnish, the family were among those Finns whose first language was Swedish).

The first two rooms of the show are devoted to the varied results of what was clearly a prolific output – life studies, self-portraits, fantasy pictures and, later, abstract studies from nature – but seemingly without a governing direction. The political woes of the Baltic states in the 30s and 40s were not conducive to a stable career and perhaps her most impressive work from this period is seen in the ferocious graphic covers that she did for the Swedish magazine *Garm*, satirizing both war and the totalitarian forces essentially responsible for it.

There can be little doubt that Jansson's pacific temperament and the centrality of her belief in Home as a base for civilised living and a surety against which calamities and adventures may be confronted are a main source for her invention of Moominland and its inhabitants which began to formulate themselves during the 1940s. The arrival of *Småtrollen och den Översvämningen* (*The Moomins and the Great Flood*) in Sweden

in 1945 saw the first of the little creatures triumph against a natural disaster and the founding of the community in Moomin Valley from which the nine novels and the three picture books take their being. These were conceived as stories in which words and illustrations would be interdependent – Jansson's visualizations are essential – and the rooms devoted to select drawings and preliminary drafts are revelatory of her superb graphic skills (pen and ink may be the main medium but you can see also her use of scraper-board, pencil, and even ball-point pen). What's more, as is now becoming better known, she applied her techniques to brilliant interpretations of Swedish editions of Tolkien's *Hobbit* and Dodgson's *Snark*, while his *Alice* unusually introduces gouache tints.

The final room is devoted in part to miscellaneous work arising from publicity ephemera, but its main addition to the oeuvre is in some rare examples of the one-time famous strip cartoons that were in 1947 commissioned for the Finnish paper *Ny Tid* (*New Times*) but later became world famous through their appearance daily in the *London Evening News*. An essay by Paul Gravett in the main exhibition catalogue gives little-known details about this venture, which was focused on an adult readership, and is here backed up with examples of Jansson's preparatory drafts and sketches and printed versions of the strips, most of whose originals have disappeared. Unlike the plain walls against which most of the exhibits are shown, those of this large room are themselves done up as a giant greyscale Moominland forest landscape which is strikingly reminiscent of Max's dreamscape in *Where the Wild Things Are*.

In conclusion, I am bound to remark how, in contrast to provisions by the *House of Illustration*, Dulwich not only explains its exhibits with neat and unobtrusive labels but offers a 'hand-held guide' to them which includes translations of the narrative pictures that help one to understand what the illustration is actually illustrating.

A Drink of Water and other stories, John Yeoman illus. Quentin Blake. Second edition. Thames & Hudson, 2017, 978-0-5006-5135-3. £10.95hbk

All the Year Round, John Yeoman illus Quentin Blake, Andersen Press, 2017, 978-1-7834-4613-1 £12.99hbk

Brian Alderson is founder of the **Children's Books History Society** and a former Children's Books Editor for *The Times*. His book **The Ladybird Story: Children's Books for Everyone**, The British Library, 978-0712357289, £25.00 hbk, is out now.

BfK reviews

Under 5s Pre – School/Nursery/Infant

Kevin, The Make-Believe Friend You Can Really Believe In

★★★★★

Rob Biddulph, Harper-Collins, 40pp, 978 0 00 820741 0, £12.99, hbk

Sid blames his domestic misdemeanours on an invisible friend. If his dinner's thrown on the floor or his ball breaks the bird bath, then he's not to blame. It's Kevin. When Sid is invited to describe the invisible Kevin by his exasperated and understandably sceptical parents, he draws a furry pink spotted blob, who is 'kind but clumsy'. Little does he expect to meet Kevin that very night and go to live in Kevin's family as Kevin's imaginary friend. Once there, however, he creates exactly the same kind of chaos which he has attributed to Kevin in his own life. But

there his actions give him pause for thought. Rob Biddulph has created a clever rhyming cautionary tale about personal responsibility and friendship that is funny and thoughtful and brought to life in stylish illustrations. Perhaps cleverest of all, because never put into words, is the contrast between the sepia of Sid's ordinary life, with its implied loneliness and boredom, and the weird psychedelic forms and colours of his imagination. It's a book that's not only cautionary but also reassuring and comforting. **CB**

Hack and Whack

★★★★★

Francesca Simon, illus Charlotte Cotterill, Faber & Faber, 32pp, 978-0-571-32872-7, £6.99, pbk

It is bedtime but Hack and Whack, lively Vikings brothers, are not keen

on the idea; they would much prefer to carry on roaring, raging and rampaging. Causing havoc wherever they go, they collect other children along the way to join in their noisy rumpus. However their fearsome mum is determined to get them ready for bed and she catches up with them in the end. Unceremoniously they are bathed and inserted into miniature long ship beds – because 'even Vikings need to sleep!'

The story is rhyming and repetitive and invites young readers to join in: We're Hack and Whack on the attack! There is lots of spot in the detailed illustrations and plenty of humour; children will love the scene when our young mischief makers tip over a Viking WC - complete with occupant.

The detailed end papers give a great sense of life in a Viking village,

the arrows at the back of the book tell the story of Hack and Whack's chaotic bedtime escapade.

Two new irrepressible and irresistible anarchic characters from Francesca Simon creator of the highly popular *Horrid Henry* series. **SMC**

The Snow Lion

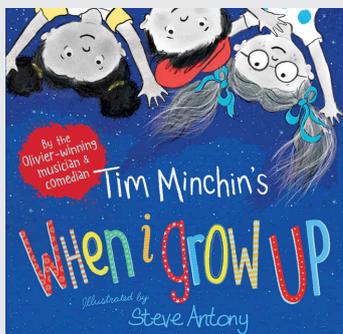
★★★★★

Jim Helmore, ill. Richard Jones, Simon & Schuster, 32pp, 978 1 4711 6224 4, £6.99 pbk

Caro and her mum move to 'a house at the top of a hill' and when Caro discovers that everything in the house is white - white walls and ceilings and doors – she feels lonely and wishes for friends. Magically, a cuddly white lion materialises from the wall and suggests a game of hide and seek. The almost mystical illustrations of

reviews

Under 5s – Pre-School/Nursery/Infant continued



When I Grow Up

★★★★

Tim Minchin, illus Steve Antony, Scholastic, 32pp, 978-1-4071-8042-7, £12.99 hbk

What do you want to do when you grow up? Why do all those things grown-ups say you can't do because you are not grown up of course! This naturally will involve a great deal of the eating of sweets, staying up late, waking up early and 'playing with the things mums pretend that mums don't think are fun'. Here are the words of a song that is part of Tim Minchin's stage adaptation of Dahl's *Matilda* and they will certainly resonate both with a young audience as well as the adults likely to be reading them. It would have been a real bonus to have had a QR code – or even a packaged CD – with the book; a song always works best with its music.

What we do have are the illustrations by Steve Antony. We all know grumpy Mr Panda and have floated over the roofs of London in *The Queen's Hat*. Here a band of children burst from the pages indulging in every activity they believe the grown-ups really do enjoy. They are real children – Antony does not portray them as adults – full of anarchy and fun and it is this that brings the text to life. We are looking through the eyes of the children. Antony's energetic lines and attractive palette create a world that combines reality and the imagined seamlessly. The reader turns the pages to the rhythm of the words while surrounded by fantastic activity and beguiling details. A joyous book to share with children – young and old! FH

Socks for Mr Wolf A Woolly Adventure Around Ireland

★★★★

Tatyana Feeney, O'Brien Press, 978-1847179067, £12.99 hbk

Opening with a full page close-up on a very snazzy pair of long, red socks, this story immediately grabs our attention. 'Whose socks are these?' we are asked. Turn the page to meet the owner, Mr Wolf, clearly delighted to be clad in such eye-catching apparel. Indeed, 'Mr

Steve Antony answers our questions on *When I Grow Up*

When I Grow Up is the first book you've illustrated but not written. What was the process of working with Tim, and do you think illustrating someone else's words changed your approach to the illustrations?

I'm a really picky illustrator, but I knew that *When I Grow Up* was the kind of unique collaboration I'd been waiting for. It's an evocative and wistful song, but visually interpreting Tim's lyrics into a picture book was a harder than I thought it would be. It took around six months to complete.

To begin with, Tim and the team at Scholastic gave me free rein to draw whatever I wanted. I listened to the song over and over, and came up with several visual narratives. At one point I considered animal characters: a koala bear, giraffe, crocodile and elephant. Other possibilities included a dream sequence, a city jaunt and adult characters.

In the end I decided to illustrate an imaginative trio simply fantasising about all the wonderful and amazing things they can do as grown-ups. Shopping sprees, splashing in water fountains, epic pillow fights and so on.

My drawings were regularly passed to Tim, Scholastic USA and Scholastic Australia. They would then come back to me with thoughts and suggestions. At one point Tim sent me a list of emotions to explore. I didn't start chatting with Tim face to face until the book was almost complete. My main point of contact was Strawberry, the books designer and an absolute godsend. Now Tim and I just contact each other directly. Just the other day we Skyped each other to chat about our joint event at Leicester Square Theatre.

You say you listened to Tim's song while working on the book. How did that affect your illustrations?

It was all about trying to capture an emotion. Not an easy task, I have to say. I was hoping my hands would magically respond to the song. If only. I paid attention to how the song made me feel. The highs and the lows. For example, when Tim sings, 'And when I grow up I will eat sweets every day', I felt lifted, which is why I drew a character literally riding her



bike into the sky (a bit like Eliot did in the movie *ET*). And when Tim sings about being strong to carry grown-up things, I felt the a little sad, but hopeful. This is why I drew a grey statue of a man and a woman lifting the weight of the world in a sea of pedestrians.

How important were your own memories of being a child in the creation of the book?

It wasn't until the half-way point that my mind began meandering down memory lane. When I was a child I dreamt about going on shopping sprees. I was so jealous of my friends who seemed to have it all. Wouldn't it be amazing to just be able to buy whatever you wanted from the supermarket instead of milk, bread and baked beans? This is something I did put in the book.

I remember the foreverness of being a child. Adulthood was light years away. I wanted to capture that carefree feeling of anything is possible.

The children in the book are lively and vivid. How did you go about creating these three characters?

It took a while. Once I had decided that animals weren't quite working, I drew one main character: the girl with the yellow shoes and frizzy hair. But I felt like there needed to be more children, so I gave her two friends. Matilda, as we all know her, is not in the book even though I had the option to include her. I felt it would be better to create something new: a direct response to the song.

I wanted every child and guardian to see themselves in this book. The incidental inclusion was absolutely intentional.

Drawing children can be quite difficult. For me, it didn't come naturally. Really, this is my first book that prominently features children. One thing for sure is that I'm much

better at it now. I could draw these kids with my eyes closed.

Do you have a favourite spread or image in the book? If so, which one and why?

To me, a library is the perfect place to become 'smart enough to answer all the questions that you to know the answers to before you're grown up.' This is my favourite spread. I have always wanted to draw a big library scene. An illustration that truly recognises and celebrates libraries. There are lots of fun little details to look out for on this page. Look closely and you'll find a key, a lightbulb, a heart, a melting snowman and even a sleepy dragon. I like how one of the main characters wants to borrow as many books as possible and how one child is physically overwhelmed by a heap of books. It's quite a symbolic image. Several other illustrations in the book have different layers of meaning, too.

You've thanked your designer Strawberry Donnelly for her help. Can you say something about Strawberry's contribution to your work and how you work together?

At one point we were emailing each other five or so times a day! Many illustrators will agree that it's sometimes hard to know if something is genius or a pile of pants, especially when you're burning the midnight oil. I was lucky to have such a supportive, honest and encouraging designer by my side.

I would send her my roughs and she would make suggestions. Colours were a bit tricky to get right. Most of the colours on the Candy spread, one of my favourites, were suggested by Strawberry.

Will this be the first collaboration between you and Tim Minchin?

I'd be happy to work with Tim again. But this is such a unique project, it feels like a one-off. I think Tim would agree that, if we were to collaborate again, it would absolutely have to be something we can both believe in. In the meantime I'm happy to continue working on my solo projects. Maybe another unique collaboration will present itself, who knows?

Is there another song you'd really like to illustrate?

That's a good question. A festive song would be fun. I really don't know, but I'm open to ideas!

Wolf felt taller when he wore them' says the text and yes, in the illustration he is standing tall and proud, almost rising off the ground in Tatyana Feeney's naïve, appealing pencil illustrations. Pictures follow of him dancing for joy, but trouble is approaching: a hole appears in the heel of one of the socks, and gets bigger and bigger until the picture fills almost the whole page. Mr Wolf tries various methods to fix things until finally resorting to the library and a book.

This is where the story takes off in a new direction: Mr Wolf notices a piece of yarn, just what he needs now, and follows it determinedly through town and countryside until he reaches the sheep it is attached to. The obliging sheep is happy to read the book while Mr Wolf darns his socks with its wool, and indeed creates two new pairs. It's a warm, witty celebration of, well, lots of things: the joy of fixing and making something; the ordinary pleasures that something like a bright pair of

socks can bring; even of Ireland itself – a map on the frontispiece shows the path of Mr Wolf's journey around his homeland as he follows the yarn. Tatyana Feeney's use of printmaking techniques adds interesting textures and despite the simple story there's a real variety of scene, image and composition. Mr Wolf is a hugely appealing character, slightly gawky but with a real confidence in himself and what he needs to do. A charming picture book for the very young. LS

New Talent

The Eli Collection: Egg, Cards, Pencil

★★★★★

Laura Bellini, *Tiny Owl*, 9781910328279, £24.95 boxed hdbk
Little Eli is a dragonfly. He is alone. Exploring his surroundings he comes across objects that open possibilities for him to be creative and build dreams.

There is an almost dreamlike quality to Bellini's delicate lines that captures both the gossamer fragility of the little dragonfly, the faded splendour of his surroundings, the nature of his dreams. But they are far from ephemeral; there is a subtle strength that mirrors Eli's determination as he attempts to build a castle of cards, a tower of eggs, a pillar of pencils. His efforts look doomed to failure as the cards fall to the floor, the eggs crack and break, the pencils tumble down. However, that is not the end; out of each catastrophe comes something new and exciting. You just need imagination and perseverance.

Boxed together, these enchanting and intriguing books are a real gift. Their design is unusual – but

perfectly captures the narrow space within which an insect operates – the corner of a room. There are tiny details to be explored – but without detracting from the spare subtlety of the whole. Eli – a dragonfly – is a real character; a child exploring his environment putting ideas into practice, following disappointment with a success that has taken a new direction. These are quiet books to be savoured alone or shared with another. They are books to stimulate not just conversation but visual literacies that are, perhaps, less familiar. Bellini is an artist to watch – and these are a welcome addition to the growing number of silent books appearing on the scene. Delightful, unconventional, desirable. **FH**



The Ugly Five

★★★★★

Julia Donaldson, ill. Axel Scheffler, Scholastic, 32pp, 978 1 407174 19 8, £12.99 hbk

Julia Donaldson has been on safari and the happy result is this humorous celebration, not of the usual, glamorous 'Big Five' animals of the African plains, but rather of a motley group of the 'ugliest' animals of the continent. These are 'The Ugly Five', Wildebeest, Warthog, Spotted Hyena, Lappet-Faced Vulture and Marabou Stork. Julia Donaldson deploys her characteristic and accomplished rhyming text to depict these five creatures joining forces to proudly celebrate their own ugliness as they march across the savannah singing their song. In a satisfying and heart-warming ending the ugly gang of five are confronted by their own babies who proceed to thank them for their love and care and proclaim them 'the Lovely Five'.

Julia Donaldson's brilliant, rhyming text reads aloud as perfectly as ever, there is a great sense of fun and brio as the animals, and birds, positively revel in their own supposed ugliness. Axel Scheffler's illustrations, full of witty expression and detail, depict the African landscape beautifully and complement the text impeccably.

The book does convey messages about not judging by appearance and the strength of family love. There is also a conservation theme via the link

with "Tusk", a charity that supports the people and wildlife of Africa whilst the final double page spread gives the chance to learn about many more African animals. As ever though, the lasting effect of a Julia Donaldson/Axel Scheffler collaboration is to pass on a sense of fun and warm-hearted humour and to give children and adults alike a completely satisfying reading experience. **SR**

I am Bat

★★★★★

Morag Hood, *Two Hoots* 9781509834617, 32pp, £11.99 hbk

'I am Bat', he declares, his wings folded protectively around his stash of cherries. But his fearsome expression, his threat that he will be angry, is not enough; someone takes his cherries. 'I will never be happy again'. Or will he?

Morag Hood is fast establishing a reputation as a creator of clever, intriguing, sophisticated yet simple picture books that ask the reader, whatever the age, to think and engage. Her minimalist approach is the perfect medium. There are no unnecessary details to detract from the words and the images. Here the text speaks directly to the audience. Bat looks out at us, demanding that we listen to him. His expressions speak volumes – from fierce determination to inconsolable

disappointment and final joy. These are the extremes of childhood – and that is what the reader will recognise. Emphasising the narrative is a clever use of fonts and page design heightening the humour of what is a story about sharing and generosity. That this is unstated makes it all the more effective and powerful. Subtle, sophisticated, fun – this is a deceptively simple picture book that really does deliver its message. Highly recommended. **FH**

Dragons, Father and Son

★★★★★

Alexandre Lacroix, ill. Ronan Badel, *Words and Pictures*, 64pp., 978-1-7849-3828-4 £9.99 hbk

Drake's father tells him that he is a big boy now and that its time to go to the village and burn a few houses. Drake has only ever toasted himself a small slug or caterpillar for a snack, and really doesn't want to burn down houses, but he sets off obediently. At the first house, before he can burn it down, a small boy greets him with delight and suggests that the school would be a good idea instead, because he hasn't done his homework, but a teacher soon puts a stop to that idea. She explains that the children love learning about dragons and gets them to draw pictures to give to him, then suggests that he set fire to an abandoned shack down by the river. The shack turns out to belong to a fisherman, so he can't burn that down, either, and eventually they share a meal of delicious freshly caught roasted trout. Drake then returns home to his father, who is anxious that humans will no longer fear dragons, but Drake, who has learnt a thing or two, shows him the pictures and says that the humans admire him in particular, and all is well.

The illustrations are terrific – father looks really grumpy and fierce, but there is a lot of humour in the double-page spreads and especially in the portrayal of the human characters, some of whom are evidently frightened of dragons. There are details to spot, like the long bone used as a curtain rail in the dragons' scary-looking cave. The text was written in English although the author is French, (he is a teacher and editor) and flows well, with some possibilities of drama in the telling e.g. 'Just as he was taking a deep, deep breath to set the fragile building alight....' and of course the idea that parents are not always right may lead to some interesting discussions. This will be fun to read and share. **DB**

The Glassmaker's Daughter

★★★★★

Dianne Hofmeyr, ill. Jane Ray, *Frances Lincoln*, 32pp, 978-1-84780-676-5, £12.99, hbk

In Venice a glassmaker lives with his daughter Daniela. Despite being

surrounded by the beauty of the city and her father's wonderful creations Daniela is sad. In desperation, the glassmaker offers the gift of a glass palace for anyone who can make his daughter smile. There are many attempts, including a sword swallower, a mask maker and a lion tamer but despite their brilliance they all fail. Then a young glassmaker decides to try, through skill and mysterious alchemy he creates a special gift (made of glass obviously) and goes to visit the glassmaker's daughter. The gift is a looking glass. When Daniela looks into it she sees a very funny, grumpy face looking back. Suddenly her face changes, amused by her reflection Daniela begins to smile and then laugh out loud. Her happiness is so infectious soon the whole city is happy too, and there is laughter and dancing.

The foreword provides a fascinating insight into the historical context for the story; medieval Venice renowned for its glassmaking, the wealth and prestige of its craftsmen and the efforts made to keep their recipes for glass and mirror making secret.

With a clear message about finding happiness within ourselves, this is a beautifully written story in true fairy tale style. The illustrations, by highly acclaimed illustrator Jane Ray are beautiful too – the glass shattering spread is truly stunning. **SMC**

One Christmas Wish

★★★★★

Katherine Rundell, ill. Emily Sutton, *Bloomsbury*, 72pp, 978 1 4088 8573 4, £14.99, hbk

I am not quite sure what to make of this. It's a handsomely produced story, with a striking gilded cover, of a magical Christmas adventure told as much by Emily Sutton's illustrations as Katherine Rundell's text. Theodore is an only child whom we find unpacking old decorations to hang on a bare tree whose lights don't work. His parents have such busy working lives that they have had no time to buy new decorations, mend the lights or buy a turkey. Theo is left in the charge of a babysitter who has fallen asleep over her mobile phone. Not an auspicious Christmas Eve. However, the old decorations – a tin soldier, a rocking horse, a robin and an angel – come to the rescue. As in a fairy tale, each decoration requires something to make them complete. Achieving these quests is so exhausting that Theo is fast asleep when his parents return, summoned from their office desks by visions of a flying rocking horse eating a windscreen wiper (the horse's voracious appetite is a very funny running joke). And what a pile of presents greets Theo under a dazzling tree on Christmas morning. Katherine Rundell's story is as both familiar and unfamiliar as Christmas

reviews

5 – 8 Infant/Junior continued

stories should be. I am less certain about Emily Sutton's illustrations. These take their cue from the old Christmas decorations and place the story in a retro 1950s with Theo in striped pyjamas and a toyshop with bears and dolls on shelves and no Lego in sight. It's a lovingly created homage to an idea of Christmas but jars with the modern references to the babysitter's phone and parents so driven that neither can come home early on Christmas Eve (no fifties mum in the kitchen here). The ending, too, raises questions which readers may puzzle over. There is such a contrast between the Christmas Eve dearth and cold and the Christmas morning warmth and cornucopia. Can Theo's parents have been so neglectful to have given him no hope on Christmas Eve, only to shower him with presents the next day? Or, more worryingly, was the joy of the morning down to the decorations' restorative magic and the parents had no part in it at all? Is the story not for children after all, but a warning to modern parents who might have forgotten what Christmas should be about? **CB**

The Knight Who Took All Day

★★★★

James Mayhew, Graffeg, 32pp, 978 1 9120 5045 1, £6.99 pbk

The knight in this neo fairy tale is more than a little self-obsessed. His efforts to impress the uninterested princess with his daring send him searching the countryside, far and wide, for a dragon to fight; but he's utterly incompetent as we're shown when he rides through 'thick tangled forests and looks into gloomy caves' (a dragon's foot and gaping mouth); he even stands on a dragon's nose ('peered down a raging volcano', we're told).

Then one day when a large dragon does finally appear on the scene, rampaging and generally wreaking havoc, the delighted knight has his devoted squire running up and down the hundred and one steps to the armoury for the right gear: shining armour, a helmet with visor and plume, and matching cloak. Oh and his trusty sword and best shield. Finally the knight is ready and looking fantastic; but in the meantime, the princess herself has coolly and calmly taken command and tamed the dragon herself. Needless to say, the knight is far from pleased but what happens next – and yes, there is a happily ever after ending – will surely make him rue his procrastinatory vanity all the more.

There's visual humour aplenty in Mayhew's wonderful crayon outlined illustrations: the sight of that poor squire dashing up and down those stairs for instance and that of the rather portly, over-dressed knight heading out to meet his adversary. Not so much a tale of derring do as one of derring didn't do. **JB**

Come all you little persons

★★★★

John Agard, ill. Jessica Courtney-Tickle, Faber 32pp, 978-0-571-32416-3 £6.99 pbk

John Agard's work is well-known, appreciated and deservedly award-winning, and this picture book, with wonderful illustrations by Jessica Courtney-Tickle, will delight his current fans and may create new ones. He dedicates the book to the Mi'kmaq, (First Nation in Nova Scotia), for whom there is a gateway between this world and the spirit world, and that is the idea behind this book. The 'little persons' are representative of various aspects of Nature: bird-person in feathered cape, fish-person in blouse of scales, and so on, all beautifully illustrated as friendly beings with important jobs to do, and they are called and collected one by one as the book progresses. They all join in the dance of Earth's guests at the end of the book. 'Just follow your heart-song when next it calls. Planet earth has room for the footsteps of all'. One to be treasured. **DB**

Pirate Baby

★★★★

Mary Hoffman, ill. Ros Asquith, Otter-Barry Books, 978 1 91095 995 4, £11.99 hbk

When the pirate ship 'Ramshackle' sails past a strange object floating on the water, the pirate crew soon find themselves rescuing a baby, and a girl baby at that, and having to learn how to look after her. The resourceful pirates discover unknown skills as they squirt condensed milk from a syringe into the baby's howling mouth, sew nappies from the skull and crossbones and even make a toy squid from a pair of old gloves. The pirates become baby Isla's new family and refuse to give her up, not to the fierce crew of women pirates they attempt to plunder and not to the terrifying sea monster that rises from the deep. Isla herself, a true pirate baby, saves them all from the sea monster by giving away her beloved toy squid.

This is a humorous pirate story which manages to convey some subtle messages about gender and role reversal with its fearless pirate girl, a dauntless, and daunting, band of women pirates and the caring, ingenious crew of the 'Ramshackle'. Ros Asquith's lively, colourful comic-style illustrations enhance the text of a picture book that is full of fun and energy and should appeal to all pirate adventure loving young readers. **SR**

A Werewolf Named Oliver James

★★★★

Nicholas John Frith, Alison Green Books, 32pp, 978-1-4071-7198-2, £6.99 pbk

Oh my goodness, this is absolutely brilliant: Nicholas John Frith just keeps on getting better and better. First

there's the absolutely luscious colour palette; the story itself is irresistible and the illustrations awesome.

Let's meet the star of the show, one Oliver James. He's a fairly normal lad, rule-abiding and keen on music. One slightly eerie evening after band practice as he waits for the bus, something strange happens. All his friends disappear suddenly and then the bus sails past without stopping, leaving Oliver well and truly stranded. When someone does eventually show up, he merely shouts, 'HELP! A WEREWOLF!' and dashes away. Oliver's alarmed but then, seeing his reflection, discovers that he's the werewolf.

Pretty alarming, but also amazing; his metamorphosis brings with it super-fast speed, super strength and the power to leap effortlessly over buildings. All this is howlingly exciting and Oliver can't wait to go and tell his friends of his new super-powers. But then the clock strikes six; Oliver James must get home fast; but how will his mum and dad react when he arrives?

Terrific entertainment: an energetic text with not a single superfluous word and terrific, retro style art work (think Margaret Bloy Graham) with some wonderful visual puns – don't miss the road signs at the junction past which Oliver races home – and a supremely satisfying, double helix of a final twist. **JB**

La La La

★★★★

Kate DiCamillo, ill. Jaime Kim, Walker Books, 64pp, 9781 4063 7800 9, £9.99 hbk.

The only word in this glorious book is 'La', which is sung, shouted, hollered, joyously crooned, imploringly called and finally sung back to the little girl protagonist of the otherwise wordless narrative. It begins with the spotlighted child standing alone and singing a single 'La', which she then follows with several more. There's no response so she stomps off outside and addressing the falling leaves, sings to those too, and in fact to the whole tree, rather more forcibly. Silence. She then directs lots more 'La's to the pond and surrounding foliage: still she receives nothing in return.

Sadly she walks back indoors, sits down and thinks. Later she sets out once more beneath a gorgeous purple, starry sky and begins sending a volley of 'La's towards the moon. A deadly hush prevails. Back goes the girl, returning with a ladder up which she begins to climb. So eager is she for a response from the moon that she keeps on climbing until she reaches the top and then 'La La La La', she sings.

Seemingly the moon hasn't heard her song, so she returns home and, worn out by her efforts, drops off to sleep on the floor. Suddenly she's woken by a sound coming from outside. Could it be the moon perhaps? It is, and off out she goes where a dazzling duet takes place beneath the stars.

This superb dramatic sequence unfolds as a slowly building ode to

hope, determination and friendship, thanks to a duet between author and illustrator that is as felicitous as that between the girl and the moon. **JB**

This Zoo Is Not For You

★★★★

Ross Collins, Nosy Crow, 32pp, 978 0 85763 895 3, £11.99 hbk

When the platypus arrives at the zoo in the platybus, a mistake is made, and the animals think he has come for an interview to be accepted into the zoo. Each of the interviews is conducted by animals: a panda, flamingos, monkeys, chameleons and an elephant. They are terribly unkind about the Platypus and rather indifferent. He is too small and plain; he doesn't eat bamboo, and certainly isn't elegant or graceful; he can't do tricks nor change colours, and the elephant thinks he's 'weird'. The little Platypus is rather taken aback about all this as all he wanted to do was to deliver an invitation to a platypus party on the platybus. With his head high, he retreats to the bus. When the animals find the left-behind invitation, they realise what they have done and that they have been unkind. Off they go to apologise and to be accepted as friends into a bus load of partying platypuses. This is an excellent story about accepting people as they are, their differences and their strengths and not making instant assumptions. The platypus comes out best because he is willing to forgive the unkindness of the too-sure-of-themselves animals. The animals' expressions say it all, as does the platypus's face when being bombarded with poo by the monkeys! There is lots of space in the illustrations, and the animals are very much centre stage while the pastel backgrounds add to the colourfulness of the whole. An excellent story full of rhyme sets the scene perfectly for the big party at the end: 'The platybus is for all of us!' **ES**

The Great Gran Plan

★★★★

Elli Woollard, ill. Steven Lenton, Macmillan, 32pp, 978 1 4472 5479 9, £6.99 pbk

A funny little tale with lots of characters and twists and jokes involving fairy tales. You need to know a few to get the most out of this book. A little pig gets wind of the wolf's dastardly plan to capture Gran after he made it very clear to said wolf that he won't be huffing and puffing and blowing his house down. So he is a brave little chap who has some brains and wants to protect Gran. You might recognise him from another fairy tale?

He goes through town trying to purchase various items he feels would be best to repel the wolf. The illustrations give the readers lots to look at-especially some of the shop names, it will make grown-ups laugh too. There is a bit of a problem as when he amasses these items he actually begins to look very much like....well I'll leave it to you to guess. When the wolf comes across him he

5 – 8 Infant/Junior continued

mistakes him for somebody else but that somebody else saves the day but you'll have to wait to meet them when you read the book.

There is an appropriate ending for intercepting the wolf which, again, contains lots of humour. There are some great alternative Three Little Pigs and Red Riding Hood stories but this one is up with the best of them and would be a funny one to share with not only 5 - 8 but older children too as they would see the more subtle

humour in the language and the details in the illustrations. **SG**

Imagine

★★★★

John Lennon, ill. Jean Jullien, Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 32pp, 978-1-8478-0896-7, £12.99, hbk

Each school I've been in as a Headteacher has amassed the latest Amnesty publications and I would certainly add this beautiful book to that collection. What more can I say

about the text itself – this is one of the most famous peace songs in existence. However the pictures and the book itself DO add to that and will hopefully help to bring the words to a whole new audience. The book should place John Lennon's abstract ideas in children's minds and help them understand them. The illustrations are simple: bright, bold and eye catching. All of them feature a little pigeon with a little messenger bag making sense of the world. He spreads peace and love and understanding on his travels and the pictures show that throughout.

There is a moving introduction from Yoko Ono who makes the point that the book is very important at the present time, her passion for spreading John Lennon's message is still as strong as ever. It is a book to grace an assembly or display shelf in school and certainly one to appreciate and share at home. The style and layout are lovely for children to enjoy by themselves but also for a class to enjoy - seeing the story of the pigeon's travels in front of them and then perhaps listening to the song again which will then have a more powerful meaning as those pictures will help them IMAGINE. **SG**

8 – 10 Junior/Middle

Secret of the Stones

★★★★★

Tony Bradman, illus Martin Remphry, Barrington Stoke, 72pp, 978-1781127544, £5.99

This fast-paced story of Bronze Age adventure and discovery will bring the period to life for young readers and far more vividly than even the best history book. The story begins at Stone Henge, already a place of wonder to the people who live nearby. Maglos is the son of the High Priest and his father Daguno is preparing to sacrifice a bull at the great mid-summer festival. But Daguno's brother Tigran is jealous and at the moment of sacrifice takes the axe and slaughters his brother. Maglos is saved only when two strangers in the crowd take him as a slave. In the depth of his misery, Maglos feels as though he too is already dead, but his life is about to take a new turn. The two foreigners who saved him are kind and take care of him while he grieves for his father. They are travelling metal-workers, criss-crossing England making and selling copper weapons, jewellery and other items. Maglos is fascinated by the process of making copper and readers will be too. Eventually, armed with a fine bronze sword he is able to

return to Stone Henge and take his rightful place at the altar.

The story unfolds through the eyes of Maglos, who in Tony Bradman's skilful telling comes across as a living, breathing boy. There's a great deal of historical information for readers, but cleverly woven into the story so that it is fully part of the adventure. It's real page-turning stuff, and will be for even the most reluctant readers. **MMA**

The Secret Diary of Jane Pinny: Victorian housemaid (and accidental detective)

★★★★★

Philip Ardagh; illustrated by Jamie Littler. Nosy Crow, 192pp, 9780857639035, £6.99, pbk

This is a story of the downstairs staff in a country house and the solving of the mystery of a missing jade necklace. Jane Pinny is a housemaid who gets a new job in the large household of Mr. Kirby-Trott. Coming from a small town the house is quite a shock but Jane is determined to get on and finds everyone welcoming, even the frightening looking butler, Mr. Pritchard. Jane's diary, which tells this story, is written for her by the pigeon Plump and he is instrumental in finding clues as to the mystery of the mistress's missing necklace.

This is great fun as one would expect from Philip Ardagh and Jane is an endearing and spirited heroine. There is a goodly amount of information about the life in a Victorian house below stairs, and the black and white wash illustrations add to the fun of the story. There are a lot of footnotes giving the historical background though I am not sure they are necessary: the skill of an historical novel for any age, is that the background information is imparted within the frame of the story and this happens within the text of this one. But the yellow sticker on the cover states 'only the facts are true' so maybe the author/editor thought them a necessary gimmick. This is the second in a series and I for one, would hope that there would be more tales of Jane Pinny. **JF**

Witch for a Week

★★★★★

Kaye Umansky, illus Ashley King, Simon and Schuster, 192pp, 978-1471160905, £6.99 pbk

A new book from Kaye Umansky is always cause for celebration. She's one of our funniest and most accomplished authors for children and **Witch for a Week** has all the hallmarks of a Umansky classic: a cast of distinctive characters; comedy of all kinds, much of it arising from the characters' close proximity to one another; lots of original ideas, and the occasional sideways dig at modern mores. Young readers will love it and adults should fight for the right to read it at bedtime or storytime.

Elsie Pickles lives with her family in the town of Smallbridge, a place where life, like its river the Dribble, 'trickled on with a calm monotony'. She spends lots of time helping in the family shop but Elsie is a girl with a sense of adventure and readers will feel she deserves something more. When the local witch Magenta Sharp arrives looking for someone to house-sit her tower for a week and offering more gold than the shop's made in years, Elsie puts herself forward. Before you can say Three Little Spells for Beginners, Elsie is settled in the tower keeping an eye on it and the witch's somewhat curmudgeonly talking raven, Corbett. The Pickles rules of customer service stand Elsie in good stead, particularly the ones about using a soothing tone and always being helpful. The witch's neighbours include Sylphine Greenmantle (also known as Aggie), given to barefoot dancing in the forest glades and swooning over woodcutter Hank of the beautiful hair; Joey the boy who delivers the ingredients for Magenta's potions, and letters of complaint from customers to her mail order spell business; and the peculiar, light-fingered Howler sisters; while Elsie inadvertently adopts the town's stray dog Nuisance as well. Soon, despite her vow not to try magic, Elsie is conjuring up frogs and storms in teacups, and trying to concoct the love potion Sylphine wants to use on Hank.



Readers will feel they themselves are part of the gang and Elsie's calm, practical approach is really appealing; when her spells work, we can't help feel it's as much down to her kind nature as to her growing magical powers. The relationship between the protagonists and Elsie's development too are both described with an extraordinary lightness of touch, and this is a charming mix of magic, comedy, character and adventure. **MMA**

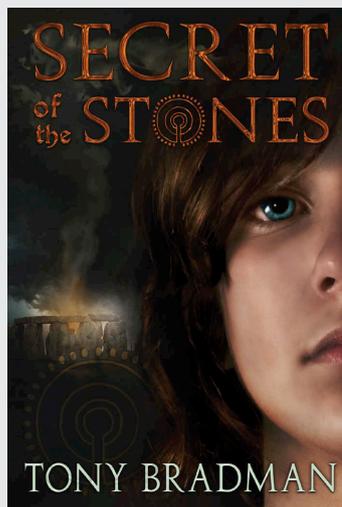
[Read our interview with Kaye Umansky](#)

Professional Crocodile

★★★★★

Giovanna Zoboli, ill. Mariachiara di Giorgio, Chronicle Books, 25pp, 978-1-4521-6506-6, £12.99, hbk

The story of this wordless picturebook begins with the main character, a crocodile, asleep in a city apartment dreaming of basking in a tropical pool. The alarm clock rings and a familiar morning routine follows, as the crocodile decides which tie to wear, eats breakfast and leaves for work. We follow him on his commute in the busy city, splashed by a passing car and squashed on a crowded tube train. He greets familiar faces and buys a roast chicken lunch and a bunch of flowers, mysteriously delivered later to a lady



reviews

8 – 10 Junior/Middle continued

at a window. We arrive in a park and find ourselves entering a zoo through the monkey enclosure. The crocodile is revealed undressing and approaching a pool. Opening the final spread, we discover his job is to swim in the pool and entertain the zoo's visitors. Truly a professional crocodile. This is an engaging narrative with a clever ending effectively told through a very well-designed sequence of detailed watercolour images. Movement is effectively conveyed through a series of images as the crocodile descends in the lift and with a blur of speed as he rushes through the city streets. Once the reason for the title has been discovered, readers will want to go back again and spot all the other animals on their way to work too, and wonder if they are also heading for the zoo. The image of the monkey enclosure also requires a closer examination, with one reading a book, one looking at his watch and another on a mobile... is the suggestion that the life of a zoo animal is boring perhaps? There is definitely lots to think and talk about in this excellent picturebook. **SMc**

Pop up Shakespeare

★★★★

Ill. Jenny Maizels, Reed Martin, Austin Tichenor, Walker Books, 10pp, 978-1-4063-7107-9, £16.00 hbk

Pop up Shakespeare is an exciting book with spectacular paper engineering and lots of intriguing flaps to lift. This is a book you can read from all angles which would look wonderful displayed open in a classroom, a library or child's bedroom.

An exciting double page spread is devoted to each category of drama: the comedies, romances, histories and tragedies. Plot summaries are provided. The very brief moral in a nutshell 'long story short' is a nice touch (e.g. re Othello: don't believe everything you hear!). Shakespeare's inventiveness with language is highlighted and there plenty of memorable quotes. The purpose and poetic construction of sonnets is outlined briefly.

Although written in a light heated style, there is lots of information here. Readers will find an introduction to Shakespeare's life at the beginning of the book including an insight into various controversies; his mysterious disappearance for several years, whether or not he wrote all the plays ascribed to him (whether indeed as a glove maker's son he could write at all) and what happened to his 'missing' play entitled *Cardenio*. For young readers who like facts and figures there is information on not only how many plays and sonnets he wrote but also how many shipwrecks and stabbings are included. There are astute insights, for example into contemporary relevance of his implicit criticism of anti-Semitism in *The Merchant of Venice*. Some comments could be construed as a little flippant, for example referring to *The Plague* as

a 'fun old fashioned disease'.

Pop up Shakespeare is a collaboration between Martin and Tichenor of the Reduced Theatre Company and the brilliant illustrator Jenny Maizels who created **Pop up London** and **Pop up New York**. This is a book which may interest fans of the *Horrible Histories* series, young readers interested in Shakespeare and collectors of paper engineered books. It appropriately ends with a suggestion to go and see a Shakespeare play live on stage. This engaging book may well tempt young readers to do so. **SMc**

Foxcraft: the Mage

★★★★

Inbali Iserles, Scholastic, 303pp, 9781407147161, £5.99 pbk

This is the third and final volume in the series **Foxcraft** which follows the journey of a young vixen called Isla as she tries to find her lost brother Pirie. In this book she has to cross into the Darklands and find a rogue fox, 'The Mage'. He and his followers have the powers of Foxcraft but use them in order to control others, not for good. On her journey Isla meets with a wolf Farraclaw she had rescued in an earlier story; he is the son of a pack leader and is able to help her on her way. She also rescues an elderly fox Metis and finds that he is the one who had inadvertently created some of the problems that face them all. How they face their challenges makes for an exciting and action packed adventure.

This is essentially a quest story with the action moving us towards the final confrontation between good and evil. Whilst it is best to have read the preceding books it is not vital and I was able to understand the plot without having done so. The author has kept the characters very much as animals, she has not tried to humanize them and they have to deal with their natural instincts. This balance of animal behaviours linked with a magical and mystical belief system makes for a complex yet believable world. It is fascinating to see the difference between wolf and fox societies, with the wolves having a hierarchical structure based around a clan (or pack), whilst foxes are more independent and do not have the same framework at all. Despite all of this we find ourselves building a rapport with the characters and the author hooks us in to the story until the final moments. This is a great story for those who love reading about nature and especially that which has a sense of magic woven through it. **MP**

Hopscotch in the Sky

★★★★

Lucinda Jacob, ill. Lauren O'Neill, Little Island Books, 64pp, 978-1-910 4-1193-3, hbk, £10.99

The poems in this first collection from Lucinda Jacob might be said to be understated. Their words are

carefully chosen and precise. They don't jostle for attention but speak quietly and wait to be heard. Their mood is most often reflective and sometimes mysterious. Have you ever wondered how many times you have been featured in the background of someone else's holiday photo and taken back to 'Texas or Kyoto?' Even the surreal moments like the mermaids in the library or the flying grannies are gentled into view and made perplexingly everyday. These are poems that invite the reader in, assuming shared experiences and memories, like walking in the wet tar of a hot concrete road in bare feet in summer or rescuing a doll's picnic from the rain. This is poetry of observation and carefully modulated emotion, perhaps most eloquently expressed in the sentiment of the poem *The Mountains and the Sea*. Exciting things may be happening there but 'We mostly make our homes between the mountains and the sea.' This is a sensitively illustrated and finely produced volume. It's perhaps disappointingly slim but it offers a range of poetic forms to satisfy the national curriculum and some memorable moments. I like 'the twig that remembers a storm' in the poem *Nature Table*; the grasshoppers that 'fall silent at our shadows edge' in *I'll Take You There*; and the bauble that escapes packing up in *There's Always One*, 'Maybe to tell us/that Christmas/is not just for Christmas.' Hopefully, there are more poems and collections to come. **CB**

How to write Poems

★★★★

Joseph Coelho, ill. Matt Robertson, Bloomsbury, 144pp, 978-1-4088-8949-7, £9.99, pbk

Written by prize-winning poet Joseph Coelho, and drawing on his experience of working with schools over 15 years, this is an activity book packed with ideas and information for aspiring young poets. It is designed to strip away the mystery of finding

inspiration and writing poetry, and sets out to motivate children to have a go and find their inner poet.

There are practical tips for building a poetry tool kit including creating word banks, playing with rhyme, using the five senses and 'rainbow thinking' or finding ways to describe colours. Easy to follow information on different poetic devices such as onomatopoeia, metaphor and alliteration is provided. There is an emphasis on a playful approach: put a tomato into the personification machine, what will pop out? Perhaps a 'blushing' tomato! Silly similes, included throughout, add to the fun.

There is an introduction to different forms of poetry and how they are constructed including sonnet, haiku and mesostic (a variation of acrostic) with an invitation and guidance on how to have a go and lots of space to try things out within the activity book itself. Many inventive ways into creating poems are introduced, including 'blackout poetry' working from a discarded text, nonsense poetry, writing poems for special people or at special times of the year. Particularly lovely is the idea of creating a nature poem by writing words or ideas on leaves.

Activity ideas are interspersed with historical facts and insights such as the longest poem, the trickiest tongue twister, the origin of the acronym RAP (rhythm and poetry in case you were wondering!). There is awareness - raising of poetry all around us for example in the names of paint colours such as 'mole's breath' grey. Although mostly geared at the individual, fun with friends is also suggested with call and response playground games and how to set up different kinds of poetry clubs.

This is a really useful and accessible book which is packed with ideas and information. It would be suitable for independent exploration at home or activities in the primary classroom. **SMc**

10 – 14 Middle/Secondary

Worry Angels

★★★★

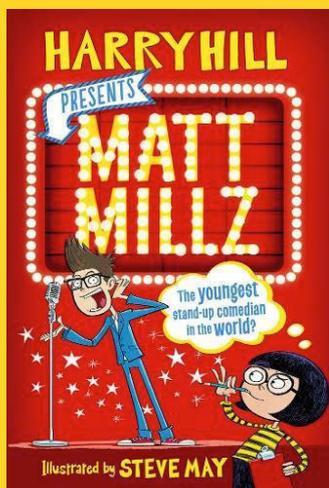
Sita Brahmachari, Jane Ray, Barrington Stoke, 96pp, 978-1-7811-2695-0, £5.99 pbk

Amy-May is aged eleven. Her parents have just conducted an angry divorce. Witnessing her mother and father fight has given Amy-May a severe condition. She is unable to attend the mainstream secondary school for which she was intended and instead has to attend the Sandcastle Support Centre, a centre for pupils who are unable to attend mainstream school. Throughout the book the centre is referred to as Grace's Art House, after the name of the woman who manages it.

Amy-May meets a Syrian refugee girl

named Rima, who is there with her family. Brahmachari's book describes the developing relationship between the two girls and their individual attempts to combat anxiety.

The book deals with two important subjects, one of which this reviewer has not seen handled with such compassion for young readers, namely school refusal. The second subject, which is increasingly visible in children's literature, is the daunting reality that confronts refugees from war zones such as Syria. This book dismantles some of the prejudices that surround both these subjects in a gentle and non-confrontational manner. Jane Ray's monochrome illustrations complement the text in a pleasantly unobtrusive manner. **RB**



GUEST REVIEW

Matt Millz

★★★★

Harry Hill, Faber & Faber, 336pp, 978-0-5713-3854-2, £10.00 hbk

Wanna-be comedians and Harry Hill fans will love this. Matt Mills dreams of being a comedian and of making the big time: he watches his heroes on DVD and hopes one day, that will be me. Trouble is, he's only twelve and the other half of his comedy double act would rather be in the art room than on stage. So Matt goes it alone. Well, nearly alone – he's got his teeny tiny manager – the appropriately name Kitty Hope with him. Everyone needs a Kitty Hope in their corner: she's focused,

she's tireless, she's fearless... she's eleven! (she nearly stole the show, for me). After a school talent show and some disastrous performances, Kitty gets Matt an audition for The T Factor (demon child of X Factor and Britain's Got Talent) – if I say any more I'll spoil the plot, but look out for a quintet of dancing chihuahuas and a rock band called Toxic Cabbage (love how they got their name).

Kids will love the illustrations by **The Beano's** Steve May and parents who take a sneaky peak will like the fact that Matt (Matthew) is actually Harry Hill's real name and that the girl the boys all fancy is called Magda (Harry Hill's wife's real name) – cute. The book is a comic caper and a kind of handbook for would be comedians – there are lots of tips, for example, dealing with hecklers (Harry Hill's own put down is the best and the funniest); and there are interesting explanations and lots of information about comedy greats to inspire young comedians – the Tommy Cooper jokes were especially well chosen: 'Last night I slept like a log. I woke up in the fireplace'. Priceless.



Special thanks to **Christine Hamill** for providing this review. Christine is the author of **The Best Medicine**, also a story of a junior

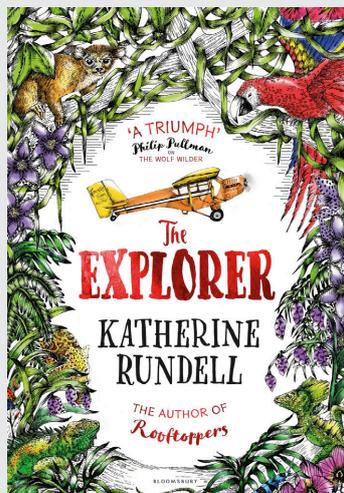
would-be comedian. It is shortlisted for the **Laugh Out Loud Book Award (Lollies)** and has a starring role for Harry Hill.)

The Explorer

★★★★

Katherine Rundell b/w line illus Hannah Horn, Bloomsbury, 400pp, 978 1 4088 5487 7 £12.99 hbk

Inspired by her own journey to the Amazon, Katherine Rundell's new novel is an atmospheric and vivid adventure. Set in an unspecified time past, four children find themselves catapulted into the Amazon jungle after the small aircraft they are travelling in crashes into the treetops after their pilot dies. Miraculously they survive and at first the children are suspicious of each other and argue about everything. Fred's fascination for explorers and love of reading books on survival at least helps them learn to fend for themselves. They face constant danger, hunger and night terrors but become braver and stronger when they finally work together as a team. They become more acutely aware of their surroundings noticing details such as how monkeys cover themselves with ants before taking honey from a bee's nest and then doing the same themselves. Desperate to find a way



back to their families they make a raft and paddle downriver. Stopping when they see a steep cliff in front of them they climb up and stumble upon a ruined city and an inhabitant they did not expect to see. Here the plot speeds up and takes a deeper and more psychological turn.

The novel is sumptuous in its descriptions of the lush and verdant landscape – almost too much at times – but the story conveys a real sense of the vastness and beauty of the Amazon. There is an underlying message that one should have respect for the landscape and that exploration carries a cost and is not always a force for good. The children appear a touch unnatural to begin with but grow and develop into their individual personalities and together form an unshakeable bond of friendship through their shared experiences. Both the explorer and the children have a profound effect on each another. This is a fiercely passionate book full of love and hope. Embellished with wonderful b/w line illustrations, it's a very handsome edition indeed. **JC**

Hetty Feather's Christmas

★★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, Doubleday, 240pp, 978-0-8575-3553-5, £12.99 hbk

At Christmas 1888 Hetty Feather is twelve years old. This book is set in the period after the other books in the Hetty Feather series and after *Clover Moon*. Christmas day is the one and only day in the year when the Foundling Hospital schedule changes. The founding children are to be given an orange, a penny, a Christmas lunch and a teaspoon of sugar on their porridge. They also make a Christmas tableau in the chapel. Hetty will see her brother Gideon, cast as the Angel Gabriel. Usually girls and boys are kept apart.

Hetty has discovered that Ida, one of the women working at the hospital, is in fact her birth mother. The rules of the hospital normally forbid such knowledge. Ida has given Hetty a Christmas present, which causes the other girls to become jealous. Hetty reacts badly to bullying and as punishment is excluded from the celebrations. But then one of the governors arrives and informs the matron that she is taking Hetty out. Hetty meets a family called the Rivers. We understand that Rose Rivers is to be the lead character in Wilson's next book. Though it is not stated, one of the other children, Beth, has what we would now call an autistic spectrum disorder.

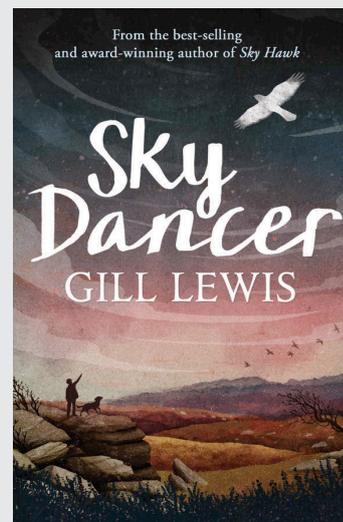
This book takes the reader through some of the conventional Victorian Christmas celebrations, certain of which will be familiar to a modern reader but others unfamiliar. At the end of the book is a section of activities for the reader to follow. Many of the young Wilson admirers will be entertained this Christmas by an engaging story linked to our traditions today. Nick Sharratt's characterful black and white snowflake illustrations marking the start of each chapter add beautifully to the cosy festive mood. **RB**

Sky Dancer

★★★★

Gill Lewis, Oxford University Press, 272pp, 978 0 19 274925 3, £6.99, pbk

Gill Lewis's latest novel brings three very different children together to raise a Hen Harrier chick in secret



and mount a campaign to stop grouse shooting on the local moor. Joe is the son of the grouse shoot's gamekeeper and we meet him as he goes with his elder brother to scatter their father's ashes. Their father had died of a heart attack after being imprisoned for shooting a hen harrier. Ella is Joe's new neighbour, a city girl who is consumed with curiosity about the moor, its creatures, its way of life and its possible future. Minty's full name is Araminta and she is the daughter of Henry Knight of Hartstone Hall, the owner of the grouse moor. The book develops an argument about the fate of wildlife on game bird estates, the way that such estates exploit and distort the natural environment and the need for rewriting the British landscape. It's an argument that is passionate, informed, developed in some detail, and supported by an afterword where the author addresses her readers directly. And it is quite a weight for a novel to carry. Most of it falls on the shoulders of Joe's first person narration. And it is his love of the moor, his emotional recoil from the killing of wildlife despite his familiarity with all the arguments for it, his feeling of isolation and his openness to friendship, his willingness to look at things afresh and, finally, his conviction of the need for change, that grounds the novel and gives it life. Such is the impetus of advocacy in the novel that it does not always avoid the sense of characters representing particular points of view, but, for the most part, it is carried by a drama in which clashes of generation and class are also keenly felt. Lewis is a sympathetic and compelling writer, observant and perceptive, who credits her readers with intelligence, curiosity and a desire to make the world a better place. This is a novel which will move, inform and inspire them. **CB**

Rising Stars New Young Voices in Poetry

★★★★

Otter-Barry Books, 96pp, 978-1-9109-5937-4, £6.99 pbk
A joint project between **Otter-Barry Books** and arts and literary

reviews

10 – 14 Middle/Secondary continued

organisation **Pop-Up**, this sparkling anthology features the work of five talented young poets. Each has a distinctive voice, and every one of the poems in this collection will catch the imagination of young people; bringing them together in an anthology gives the poems even more impact and emphasises the unique power of poetry for young people as a means to share ideas, thoughts and feelings. Ruth Awolola's poems open the collection. At the time of publication she is just nineteen years old, but there's already a maturity to her writing. In poems such as *Mainly About Aliens* and *On Forgetting that I am a Tree* she contemplates finding a place in the world, while *Superpowers* and the memorable *Pockets* have the sense of being inspired by real people. Victoria Adukwei Bulley's section opens with a poem to Lucille Clifton, 'a patron saint of black girls anywhere/ a healer of history with soft words', and the acknowledgement in it that 'Any poet's pen is heavy, some say/it takes two hands to hold one.' In poems that use a variety of different forms she wields the heavy pen with real skill and sensitivity, writing about experiences both personal and universal. Abigail Cook's poems come very much from her own self, from *My Body*, beginning 'My body is the garden I grew up in' to *Summer Day* in which 'We sat outside in our pyjamas/ whilst the world ended.' They'll speak powerfully and directly to their audience. Performance poet Jay Hulme occasionally uses rhyme, the only one of the five to do so, and there's a sense of playfulness to his poems, though always an edge too: the poem *Peas* will be excellent for class discussion. Amina Jama closes the collection and her poems, dreamy, intimate and lyrical, will leave readers thinking, wanting more. The collection is illustrated by three young students in their final year at Birmingham City University's illustration course, and the whole project is a celebration of new talent, rising stars indeed. It's exciting to read, will be exciting to share. Congratulations to all those involved in its creation. **AR**

Nevermoor: the trials of Morrigan Crow

★★★★★

Jessica Townsend, Orion, 375pp, 9781510104112, £12.99 hbk

Since early childhood Morrigan has been blamed for every bad thing that has befallen the people of her village: from her mother dying in childbirth to people tripping over or even wishing someone a good day. Because she was born on Eventide night she is doomed to die at the same time on the night she turns 11; unfortunately that date is fast approaching. However before this date there is the annual 'bid' ceremony where children

are chosen to attend different types of education. Morrigan is allowed to attend as an observer and is shocked when someone bids for her. When the eccentric Jupiter North offers her the chance to train for the Wondrous Society in the secret city of Nevermoor, Morrigan jumps at the opportunity to escape her fate, but is it 'out of the frying pan'?

This is a truly magical story that has taken the publishing world by storm. The heroine is engaging, full of determination and a real role model for young girls. The world that she finds herself in has been beautifully created and feels so real that we are quite at home. Jupiter North is a fascinating and odd character who takes delight in breaking many of the rules that surround him; however he is absolutely on the side of good and is determined to prevent evil from winning. This evil comes in the form of a character called Ezra Squall who wants to use magic for his own ends and a character called Inspector Flintlock who is the epitome of a 'job's worth'. I particularly love the way that Morrigan grows as a person and learns to believe that she is not responsible for all the bad events that happen. She discovers that she has a value as a human being and that her innate goodness makes friends and helps her through hard times. This is a very strong message and one that resonates with young people today. I really look forward to reading more of her adventures and would really recommend this title to those who want a little magic in their lives. **MP**

Do you Speak Chocolate

★★★★★

Cas Lester, Piccadilly Press, 269pp, 978 1 4714 0503 7, £5.99 pbk

This is such an aptly timed book for these times. The cover is enticing with some beautiful patterning and colours on the front.

The book a story about the ups and downs of Year 7 girls' friendships revolving around the central character, Jaz. The whole book is very well observed not just on this issue but the many more that are intertwined throughout. The many other layers include the most important initial event that brings the whole story into life-the arrival of Nadima who doesn't speak any English. The book unwraps like the bar of chocolate offered by Jaz as a gesture of friendship when Nadima is ushered into class with no English at all. The story then unfolds as the two girls develop a friendship using other ways of communicating but it also runs alongside managing a previous 'best friend' friendship in primary school with Lily who has since become friends with Kara. Jaz and Kara don't get on and Lily is stuck in the middle hoping they do. This particular part of the books is very well done and accurate in my experience of dealing with girl

friendship issues-always much more complicated, it seems than dealing with boy friendships...well for the most part!

Nadima's story gradually becomes clear through some clever and moving scenes as Jaz and others come to understand more of her own story. The writing draws you in to getting to know the characters and you quickly become part of their lives. All of them have their own challenges and all work in their different ways-another great aspect of the book for discussion and just helping people think a little more.

This book very much reminds me of Neil Gaiman's speech to the Book Trust about reading fiction to enable young people to empathise-reading opens the doors into other people's worlds, sometimes ones we hope our own children don't have to face. It is an excellent example of a book to make people think, maybe change people's thinking and make us all a bit kinder for reading it. **SG**

Scarecrow

★★★★★

Danny Weston, Andersen Press, 281pp, 978 1 78344 531 8, £7.99 pbk

Readers familiar with Weston's work will expect a finely paced, credible and thrilling adventure and **Scarecrow** provides all these elements. Jack's father found evidence of insider trading at the bank where he worked and leaked the names of those involved to the national press, putting both himself and Jack in great danger. His friend Douglas offered them his hunting lodge in a remote part of Scotland as a secure hideaway and they fled. Jack is bi-polar, his moods and occasional hallucination controlled by the medication he does not always take, so that when he sees a scarecrow apparently catching and eating a bird which has strayed too close to him he feels sure that his mind is simply playing its usual tricks on him.

For once, however, this is not the case. Philbert is a very special scarecrow, a sentient being as a result of the ancient rituals observed when he was created by Annie, mother of Rhoda and wife of Ken, living on the farm nearest to the lodge. Annie, terminally ill with cancer, constructed Philbert to keep watch over the farm and her family after her death and when Jack and Rhoda become friends Philbert extends his duty of care to him. This becomes essential when Jack's father's pursuers-with Douglas' help, find their hiding place and try to make him sign a document saying that the claims he made were false. Mysterious things begin to hinder the thugs' efforts as Philbert silently and doggedly protects those who he was made to keep safe. The tension is ratcheted up even further because only Jack knows his secret. Adventure powers through the pages and themes are worn lightly but convincingly. The adjective 'unputdownable' can be overused, but it fits **Scarecrow** perfectly. **VR**

Notes On My Family

★★★★★

Emily Critchley, *Everything With Words*, 263pp, 978 1 91142 705 6, £8.99 pbk

Louise Coulson is different. She likes to eat foods of a certain colour on designated days, doesn't eat certain food groups at the same time, loves trains and timetables and is profoundly uncomfortable around large groups of people. Inevitably, she is cruelly bullied at school but tells no-one. To add to her woes, her family life is far from tranquil. Her father, who teaches at the school she attends, is having an affair with a sixth-former and has left the family home to be with her, increasing the bullying which Lou has to endure. The affair proves too much for her mother, whose mental health deteriorates to the extent that she has to be sectioned, albeit briefly.

Into the midst of this misery and isolation comes Faith, born by surrogacy, raised by her two mothers, outrageously dressed, home-schooled, well-versed in philosophy and fiercely opposed to bullying of any kind. She becomes Lou's unlikely champion-two talented but markedly unconventional young women forging a friendship on their own unusual terms. Faith is Amazonian in build and attitude and gives Lou the support she so badly needs, but the adventure and excitement she brings to Lou's life begins to overwhelm her and, in a moment of panic, she abruptly ends the friendship.

This crisis in Lou's life, when she must step out of her comfort zone or lose someone whose friendship she enjoys, is one which will be familiar to many young people. The stresses of modern life are clearly shown in Critchley's narrative through Lou's overly ordered behaviour and her talent for observation and self-analysis. Her 'notes on my family' are revealing, perceptive and hugely entertaining with dry humour woven through. Her decision to approach Faith in order to try to renew their friendship is a brave one and when Faith reveals her own tendency to depression the two forge a new relationship based on a mutual understanding and acceptance of their difficulties. This book will reassure many readers-particularly young women who have lost their way in our often bewildering society. The narrative needs tightening in places, with some passages overlong and rather repetitive, but Faith, Lou and the travails of Lou's family need to be widely read. **VR**

The Land of Neverendings

★★★★★

Kate Saunders, Faber & Faber, 348pp, 978-0-5713-1084-5, £10.99 pbk

Holly (aged 15) and Emily (11) are sisters. Holly is disabled with seizures, impaired vision and lack of oxygen. As the story opens, Holly has just died from a violent seizure. One

of the sisters' favourite pastimes was for Emily to tell Holly stories about her favourite teddy bear, Bluey. The bear lives in an imaginary land called Smockeroon.

The imaginary land is one of the things Emily misses most when her sister is dead. She even begins to dream that animals from Smockeroon come to visit her. There is a doorway between Smockeroon and what is termed 'the

Hard World', that is to say our world. But that door has been broken. As a result, a black toad of despair has forced its way into the imaginary world, spreading gloom. Bereaved humans like Emily must take the lead in searching for the Sturvey, the authority that can establish order in the other world. Will their quest succeed? Will Emily's dearest wish be fulfilled, to see Holly and Bluey again?

Saunders does not shrink from giving an accurate and piercing account of the grief and desolation that afflict young people who are bereaved. But she casts such a sense of humanity and resilience over the grief that her book becomes uplifting. The inchoate desire sensed by every child that toys might come to life is here expanded to a global view of life and experience. The book has no illustrations as such. But it is illuminated by countless instances of intertextuality, references abounding to C.S. Lewis,

A.A. Milne and Lewis Carroll to name only three.

The risk in such a narrative is that the character who dies at the opening becomes a mere cipher. But Emily's memories of her deceased sister are so vivid and so real that she remains an active protagonist in this captivating story. All children may benefit from reading Saunders's book. But for children who have suffered a bereavement it will be specially beneficial. **RB**

14+ Secondary/Adult

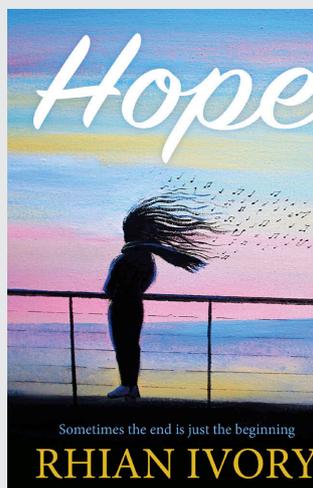
We See Everything

★★★★★

William Sutcliffe, Bloomsbury, 272pp, 978-1-4088-9019-6, £12.99 hbk

William Sutcliffe is a necessary writer for young adult readers living in our own troubled times. His previous novel **Concentr8** memorably described a world where suppressant drugs like Ritalin had become part of the everyday diet. This current story, also set in the future, features two adolescent narrators. Lex helps his father fight against his ruined country's occupying oppressors and Alan, working for the other side, directs one of the ever-present drones flying high in the sky, occasionally letting off a rocket with lethal effects on targeted civilians below.

Set in a newly bombed out London, with most well-known landmarks reduced to rubble, this nightmare world draws on several books written about what it is like to live in contemporary occupied Gaza, cited as sources in an end note. It all makes for a gripping if bleak tale, with its final denouement never certain and indeed coming as something of a surprise. There may be a tad too much self-analysis going on while each of the main characters tries to understand himself better, given that both are keen to engage with the opposite sex but only one of them has any success. Yet both personal accounts are sensitively done and substantially ring true. Non-Londoners may sometimes feel a bit out as Lex cycles to and from closely identified areas that mean everything to those who know about them and probably nothing to most others. But in broader terms this novel provides an unforgettable picture of daily life resembling a hideous video game but within which normal human fears and aspirations still exist. Lex and Alan remain recognisable teenagers throughout although now living in what is still, at least in this country, an unrecognisably horrible new urban world. **NT**



Hope

★★★★★

Rhian Ivory, Firefly, 304pp, 978-1-9100-8062-7, £7.99 pbk

Rhian Ivory's debut **The Boy Who Drew the Future** was a tense, atmospheric thriller, partly set in the seventeenth century. Her new novel **Hope** is thoroughly contemporary though with equally high levels of drama and tension.

Hope has lots to deal with: she and her mother are grieving for her father, who died suddenly and unexpectedly while the three of them were visiting his family in Italy; she's desperate to train as an actor but as the book opens, has just flunked an audition for drama school; and, though this is something we – and she – only discover later, she is suffering from PMDD (Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder). This condition heightens her sense of despair and helplessness, causing her moments of terrifying, irrational rage against herself as well as her friends. No wonder she feels that she has no future, not even a plan B now that her dreams of drama school seem finished.

Help comes in different forms. Travelling back from her disastrous audition Hope meets a boy on the ferry. Riley is good looking, funny and with a sharp sense of humour. He starts texting and emailing after they both get home and their sparky,

genuinely witty conversations provide some of the book's liveliest moments. Forced by her mother to take part in a Singing Medicine scheme at her local hospital, Hope finds that despite her initial resistance, she is able to help the sick children and adolescents she sings for. It's at the hospital too that she discovers more about her PMDD, not from a doctor, but from a fellow volunteer; talking gives her the confidence to visit her GP. The final pillar in her support network is her beloved Italian grandfather Nonno, who proves that far from being stuck at a dead end, there are lots of opportunities open to her.

Ivory manages all these different themes slickly and with skill, balancing Hope's genuine misery with a sense of ordinary teen life, and always emphasising the importance of friendship. Hope's relationship with her best friend Callie is particularly well-observed, and there are some very moving moments with her mother too. Readers will understand how deeply her mother cares for Hope, even at those times when she is struggling to understand her daughter.

The story ends on a positive note with Hope looking forward to a new start and new course, and the final scene reunites her with Riley, who has sorted out his own problems too. **RB** [Read our Q&A interview with Rhian Ivory.](#)

Everybody Hurts

★★★★★

Joanna Nadin and Anthony McGowan, Atom, 343pp, 978 0 349 00291 0, £7.99 pbk

If Lexy had been there, Sophia tells us, she'd have said, "This is totally like **Romeo and Juliet**"; and the annoying thing is that Sophia knows Lexy would have been right. Lexy is Sophia's ICE friend (In Case of Emergency); she insists on taking the role, since she's a drama queen and Sophia's a walking life-or-death drama, given that she's got a tumour the size of a tangerine growing in her brain. That tumour is the reason Sophia has an appointment at Mickey's (aka St Michael's Hospital, Leeds) where, out of nowhere and after a

few witty exchanges, a boy she's never met before kisses her. On the lips. Which is when Lexy's comment would have come in, since the whole thing is not unlike Romeo's first kiss with Juliet. It's love at first sight. Not in Old Capulet's hall crowded with Verona's glitterati, but the canteen at Mickey's where Matt – the unknown boy – has just used some fake coins to get a plate-load of trans fats at the McDonald's counter.

Matt and Sophia tell the tale in alternating chapters which often race along in breathless stand-up comedy mode. Matt's a novice at chatting up girls, let alone kissing them. Sophia's more experienced, at least as far as the technical side of things goes. But neither has known anything of what they might call love; and even though page 1 of **Everything Hurts** lists 5 things Sophia doesn't believe in and No.5 is "Love at first sight", both Sophia and Matt long for subtleties and connections which go well beyond fumbling sex for sex's sake. There are further echoes of **R&J**: a party when things are clearly going to go badly, a violent fight between rival gangs ending in a bloody stabbing – though here the feud is not between "two households, both alike in dignity", so much as the cultures of two schools from different sides of the tracks, one private, one comp.

Their narrative voices, however, could hardly be less Shakespearian. A trawl of a few random pages produces: Fucknuts, wankers, knobhead, "he's such a dick", frick-fracking (Sophia's favourite, as in "frick-fracking Jesus"), effing (as in Justin effing Bieber, effing baboon's ARSE or Killimaneffingiaro). Yet at the same time, there might be references in Sophia's chapters to Sartre, Joni, Leonard Cohen and – frequently – **The Great Gatsby**; while Matt reveals an old-fashioned decency and an honesty about what he's finding out about himself. In the privacy of their writing, both couple intelligence with reflection.

Much of their narration thinks through their feelings for each other. Nadin and McGowan may employ elements which are very familiar to experienced YA readers: the serious illness, the catastrophic party, the fight, the funny

reviews

14+Secondary/Adult continued

and empathetic gay best friend, the alternating narrators. But beyond these features, they also explore an intimacy which lies outside the grasp of Sophia and Matt's closest friends (complex characters in their own right with psychological disabilities you wouldn't wish on anyone); and also beyond their parents who in different ways - in yet another YA stereotype - display a lack of understanding worthy of Lord and Lady Capulet.

The abrasive energy of the words and actions around Sophia and Matt - and even those over-used YA features - stand in contrast to the sincerity and delicacy of the love between them, often expressed through tenderness, quick and responsive humour, and the gentle, searching language of both words and bodies. To communicate such a love is a challenge for authors who allow themselves a plot time-span of just nine days, though a final 'One Year Later' chapter gives a glimpse of how things develop. It's not giving too much away to disclose that the story of Sophia and Matt doesn't conclude as terminally as **R&J. GF**

Grave Matters

★★★★★

Juno Dawson, Alex T. Smith (illus.), Barrington Stoke, 144pp, 978-1-7811-2604-2, £7.99pbk

Sam Beauvoir is aged seventeen and filled with grief. His girlfriend Eliza, also seventeen, has died in a car crash. He was the driver, driving on a dangerously snowy road. Sam emerges physically unscathed from the crash. This book deals with how Sam copes or fails to cope with her death and his grief and guilt.

In his grief, Sam turns to necromancy. He becomes determined to bring Eliza back from the dead. The mysterious Milk Man will be his helper. Does he succeed? What are the consequences of success or failure? The tension is heightened because Sam's father is a vicar and Sam may now be tampering with the divine will.

Eliza returns in a fashion. Sam finds himself in an alternate world where he is badly injured but Eliza survives. In this alternate world Sam's mother is also seriously ill. The idea of an alternate world between the living and the dead is a very ancient concept. It occurs in Greek mythology and tragedy. It is also used, in the form of an ethereal Kings Cross station, for the last meeting place between Harry Potter and deceased Albus Dumbledore. Sam must now decide which of these two worlds is the more tolerable to inhabit.

One point rang a false note with this reviewer. The Milk Man, a satanic figure, is described as being an albino. That pale image fits well with a Gothic trope, this text reflects negatively on people with this kind of complexion, an example of unintentional disablism.

Dawson deals very deftly with powerful issues of life, religion and death. The emotions felt by Sam and his circle are highly nuanced, despite the brevity of the book. Smith's monochrome illustrations, particularly of snow, are highly evocative of Sam's bleak mood. **RB**

Moonrise

★★★★★

Sarah Crossan, Bloomsbury, 404pp, 978 1 4088 6780 8, £12.99, hbk

Sarah Crossan goes from one challenging subject to another. This time she uses the verse novel form to consider the human repercussions of the death penalty as it is carried out in many American states. Joe's brother Ed is on death row in Texas and Joe decides to leave home in New York and miss the summer holiday high school track and field programme to support his brother in what will be his final appeal and possibly the final days of his life. The great strength of the verse novel is its ability to draw the reader inside the mind and voice of its protagonist, to look from the inside out. And everything here is grippingly portrayed: Joe himself; his family; the new friends in Texas; the hand to mouth, and sometimes squalid, circumstances in which he has to survive; the atmosphere of the jail and its run-down town; his brother Ed and their relationship. Perhaps the close involvement of the prison governor, and certainly the surprise connection that emerges between him and Joe, is not so convincing. Otherwise it's a penetrating and moving novel, skilfully moving between the past and the present, and between New York and Texas, and taking us into the heart of a family already battered by circumstance and now apparently helpless in the grip of a remorseless judicial process. Unsentimental, and driven by a controlled anger about the traps that society makes for the powerless, this is, like Crossan's previous novels, both moving and thought-provoking. **CB**

No Shame

★★★★★

Anne Cassidy, Hot Key Books, 215pp, 978 1 4714 0678 2, £7.99 pbk

This is the sequel to No Virgin, in which Stacey Woods is groomed by a boy who she likes and who she thinks likes her. However, he idolises his corrupt older brother Martin and lures Stacey to a flat where she is raped by him. With the help of her closest friend, Patrice, Stacey finds the courage to go to the police and No Shame tells the story of the court case which ensues.

This book and the prequel are very important publications since they offer a familiar scenario to far too many young women and girls and, in addition, they clearly explain procedures-both medical and legal-which victims will be subjected to as the process of accusation and trial move inexorably forwards. Cassidy

is also careful to detail the help which is available, in the shape of policewoman Annie Mulligan, a charismatic and understanding woman who seeks to explain and thus to reassure, giving young women the confidence to know they were not to blame for what happened to them.

Perhaps most tellingly, the judgement of the court goes against Stacey and newspaper headlines make immediate and clumsy moral judgements which dismay her even further, causing her to retreat into her bedroom, unwilling to face the world. However, her courage and the belief which her parents, Patrice and her teachers have in her give her the strength both to continue to apply to university and to cement a friendship with a young man who she met in her part-time job. Cassidy then demonstrates that the trial was not in vain as the publicity which Martin unwisely sought after the verdict rebounded on him when three women contacted the police to say that they, too, had been raped by him.

Cassidy's thorough research, vivid characterisation and narrative honesty make this a book which should be in every school library, so that young women everywhere will be aware of both risks and rights. **VR**

It Only Happens in the Movies

★★★★★

Holly Bourne, Usborne, 444pp, 978-1-4749-2132-9, £7.99 pbk

Audrey Winters, named after Audrey Hepburn, is aged seventeen. She lives with her mother in a British suburb. Her brother is away at university. Audrey and her mother are struggling to come to terms with a deeply acrimonious divorce. Her father lives nearby with his new family. He has just insisted they sell the family home.

Audrey decides to apply for a job at the local artisan cinema, the Flicker, as a means of escaping from this distress. Audrey has been studying drama but has abandoned her plan. At the cinema she meets another employee named Harry. Harry is the charming bad boy. The book poses questions. Will Audrey and Harry become a couple? Will Audrey's interest in drama rekindle? She had been studying the tropes of romance films. What will become of her family?

Bourne has embarked on a challenging task, combining a conventional teen romance with a more fundamental attempt to define love itself. She invites her characters to examine their motives more critically and more searchingly than usual, and at the same time encourages her readers to do the same. Bourne gives us a decent picture of the charming and beguiling aspects of love. But she also gives the reader a clear perception of the anguish and disappointment love may involve. The only failing of the book is that from time to time the pace of the narrative flags and the reader easily gains the impression of a work less original and perceptive than the book is.

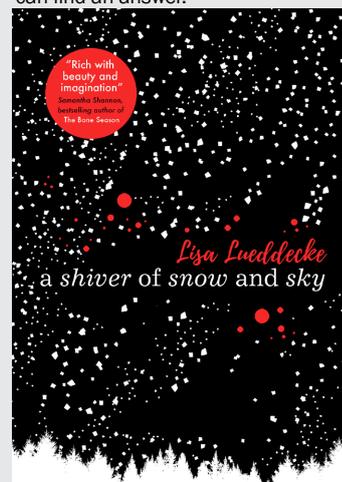
The denouement of the book is stunning at diverse levels. **RB JC**

A shiver of Snow and Sky

★★★★★

Lisa Lueddecke, Scholastic, 341pp, 9781407174037, £7.99

Osa has spent her 17 years of life dreading the return of red lights to the sky above her home on the bleak island of Skane. The lights had appeared as she was born and they brought a plague that decimated the population, including her mother. Her father and older sister have always blamed her for the death and this time she wants to find a way of preventing further deaths. However the lights are not the only thing that the islanders fear. They had fled to Skane to escape creatures called Or and yet it now looks as if their island has been found and they are going to face two dangers at once. Osa undertakes a quest to reach the mountains and ask the Goddess to help her people, whilst her friend Ivar stays behind to help train others to fight and prepare for any upcoming attack. The question is whether time will run out before they can find an answer.



This is a gripping story that really gets the reader involved, if they give it some time. The story is told from the perspective of Osa and then Ivar, so that occasionally you wonder who is narrating at that moment. However you soon settle to the pace and style of writing and find that it is difficult to put down. There is a feel of ancient Scandinavia, possibly due to the names used and it is definitely a very cold and dark winter at the time of the events. It is a story about love and friendship and also about family and how important that can be. At the heart of this is the way Osa's family allow their hurt to put the blame on Osa for something that she had no control over. The heroine is a truly strong person and makes a brilliant role model for young people today. She has a deep faith in the presence of the Goddess and will not give in to the evil that is threatening her people. This is a book that really repays the effort of reading and seeps into the reader's mind. I thoroughly recommend it. **MP**

Classics in Short No.126 Brian Alderson

A Twelfth Night Pantomime from Italy: **The Rose and the Ring**

Hallowe'en

is now seemingly the herald of the Christmas season and by the time you get to the evening of 5th January of the following year you are probably spent-up and partied-out. In earlier days however that Twelfth Night on the 5th was the culmination of less protracted and probably intenser merriment. Cakes could be made for the occasion through which a King and Queen of the evening would be chosen and partying guests might imitate characters from pantomime or from comic picture-sheets: Alderman Gobble Guzzle, say, or Miss Tittle Tattle.

Thus it was

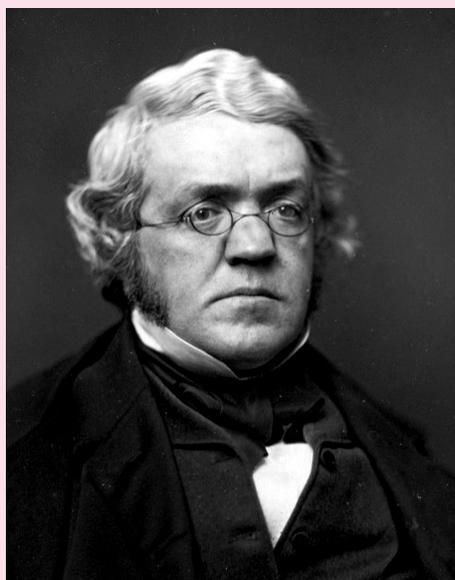
that Thackeray, holidaying in Italy early in 1854, was prevailed upon 'to draw a set of Twelfth-Night characters for the amusement of our young people'. Their naming, though – King Valoroso, the Countess Gruffanuff etc – encouraged him to give them a more extended life and they coalesced into the larger cast of what he referred to as 'a nonsensical Fairy Tale with pictures'. He wrote it and designed its illustrations during February and March, 1854 ('It is wonderful how this folly trickles from the pen' he noted in his diary) and it was published for Christmas by George Smith as **The Rose and the Ring; or, the history of Prince Giglio and Prince Bulbo**, a fire-side pantomime for great and small children and attributed to Mr M.A.Titchmarsh.



Twelfth Night an engraving by R. Staines after a painting by Daniel Maclise.

The conjunction

of festivity and theatrical extravaganza that lie behind Thackeray's pleasure in writing his story resulted in the first literary farce in children's literature (although from medieval times down to the productions of Grub Street and Seven Dials' chapbooks



William Makepeace Thackeray

there had been beguiling but by no means literary delights on offer). The plot is triggered by the traditional device, best known from 'The Sleeping Beauty', of a grumpy godmother, the Fairy Blackstick, wishing 'a little misfortune' at the christening of the heirs to the kingdoms of Paflogonia and Crim Tartary. Misfortune, though, was already lying in wait for them anyway by her earlier gifts to their parents of a rose and a ring which were endowed with the magic of making their possessors beautiful and desirable to all who might behold them.

The complexities

of the misfortunes that do indeed ensue are tumultuous beyond the powers of summary (several errors occur in the first edition owing to the author himself not recognising erroneous relationships). The two princes are matched against two princesses, Angelica and Rosalba (aka. the foundling Betsina), in realms that suffer from usurping monarchs; confusions arise through rose and ring falling into unworthy hands; Rosalba, a heroine throughout, is equal to bashing Prince Bulbo with a warming-pan and facing lions in Crim Tartary's arena. Fairy Blackstick is never far off however and her magic assists the pantomime to a just conclusion, not least through some larks with a door-knocker which are the best jape in the book.

Michael Angelo Titchmarsh

plays his part however as master of ceremonies. He keeps his audience in mind with occasional comment ('I hope you do not think there was any impropriety with the Prince and Princess walking together in the palace garden...'); he draws attention to the spirited caricatures that he has drawn to accompany his text ('Would you not fancy from this picture, that Gruffanuff must have been a person of the highest birth?'); and he augments the text itself with rhymed running-heads at the top of each page-opening as an authorial commentary: 'Other girls, the author guesses, / Like to flirt besides princesses'. Such close integration of story and metafictional devices places **The Rose and the Ring** among those few children's books, such as Kipling's **Just So Stories**, that *sui generis*, lose flavour in any other version.

The book had a notable history

before it was ever published coming first into existence as a formal manuscript by Thackeray himself, accompanied by his own delightful pen and watercolour caricatures, undertaken for the pleasure of his daughters, Annie and Minnie, who were with him in Italy. Present also was the daughter of his American friend, William Wetmore Story, who had been ill over the festive season and at whose bedside Thackeray read the book's episodes as they were written. The ms. was revised and augmented for publication with Thackeray drawing his illustrations in reverse on to wood blocks for the engraver. The loose sheets of the ms., some of which had disappeared, were later bound up as an album and the whole beautiful object became another children's-book treasure at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York who produced a facsimile of it in 1947. How could the family ever have let it go?

The Rose and the Ring is published by CreateSpace Publishing 978-1-5346-3737-5

Brian Alderson is founder of the **Children's Books History Society** and a former Children's Books Editor for **The Times**. His book **The Ladybird Story: Children's Books for Everyone**, The British Library, 978-0712357289, £25.00 hbk, is out now.