



**Armadillo**  
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# Picturebooks

## **Begin Again**

**Oliver Jeffers, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books**

Visually stunning, *Begin Again (How We Got Here and Where We Might Go. Our Human Story. So Far)* defies easy categorization, though it is framed as an adult picture book. The artwork is bold and beautiful, with striking neon pink highlights and charming little details which pop out on subsequent readings (spot the space rodent)!

Fans of Jeffers' previous picture books including *The Way Back Home*; *Lost and Found*; and *Here We Are* will already know that his texts work on many levels, the stories and pictures appealing to young children, whilst also nudging us to think about the way we live our lives. *Begin Again* takes this to the next level; instead of wrapping up big questions in cosy stories, it asks them head on, albeit in an accessible, easily understood way. Themes of conservation are evident, but as part of fundamental questions about who we are and who we want to be, how we define ourselves and how we treat others. If this all sounds a bit heavy, the overriding message of the story is one of hope. Jeffers sees art as an agent for change and believes that we can reframe our own stories. In his fascinating author's note at the end of the book, he says "I have come to believe that people are all, simply, a collection of stories. Those we are told, those told about us, but mostly those we tell both to others and ourselves."

So, who would enjoy this book? As an adult picture book, some might be concerned about it being beyond the understanding of children. But if this book asks us to ask big questions of ourselves, surely there is no demographic more questioning, more curious, and more invested in the future of our planet than young people?

## **Louise Clover**

## **Beneath**

**Cori Doerrfeld, pub. Scallywag Press**

This beautifully illustrated picture book will help young children talk about their worries and feelings. That's the message that comes across loud and clear. Finn doesn't want to talk about his worries, he wants to stay beneath the duvet in his room but slowly his grandfather draws him outside and shows him that you must look further than that which you can see on the surface. That everything has something happening 'beneath' it. As he does so Finn starts to look at the beautiful world around him and begins to open up to his grandfather.

“Sometimes beneath what looks perfectly still...so much can be swirling around.” Grandfather says as he points to a boat on the water. As we turn the page there is a beautiful illustration of a mother and son fishing from the other side of the boat, with all sorts of fish swimming beneath the surface of the water.

As Grandfather walks through the forest pointing out wildlife and nature all around, Finn slowly emerges from beneath his blanket, looking at the plants, animals and even the people that they pass. The illustrations are beautiful and perfectly complement the words on the page. One such example is the page with a picture of a small boy crying. We see his hungry tummy through his jumper. We can immediately understand what is wrong and why he is crying. His Father offers him an apple and a drink. With this and many more images this is a beautiful book to help children talk about their feelings.

**Anna Elson**

## **Butterfly Girl**

**Ashling Kwok, illus. Arielle Li, pub. EK Books**

*Butterfly Girl* is a pleasant inspiring read which would make a good addition to your nature themed library. Olivia is a little girl of primary school age who lives in the countryside enjoying the space and wildlife around her especially all the butterflies. The initial illustration shows her having a picnic by herself and being swarmed by a kaleidoscope of butterflies, they even sit on her head and her teacup! Then we see a big sign saying, ‘Olivia’s Butterfly Garden’ and we are told the butterflies are her only friends. She does not appear lonely or unhappy, she has a space of her own and a purpose. She dances with the butterflies, sings to them, builds them houses and maintains their habitat.

When she moves to the city with her family her world (and the illustrations) become grey and miserable. Living in the middle of a tower block she calls for her friends, the butterflies, but unlike every other time, they don’t come when she calls. So, she builds a new butterfly garden on her balcony, she “colour[s] her world” which by itself is still not enough to attract the butterflies but it inspires neighbours to do the same and soon the grey concrete block of flats is a riot of colour and bursting with plants.

Finally, Olivia is surrounded by her butterflies as well as her new human friends, now she “has more friends than she could have ever imagined.” This simple story, with very sparse text and charming pastel-toned illustrations created by two relatively new names to the children’s literature world celebrates not just nature and community but also an individual nurturing their passion.

**Natalie McChrystal Plimmer**

## **Count the Stars**

**Raewyn Caisley, illus. Gabriel Evans, pub. Walker Books**

What a refreshing treat this book offers! As a true lover of picturebooks I'm rarely disappointed. However, it's an absolute joy to find a book that has such a unique theme.

Maddie, the little girl in the story, loves maths with all its shapes, patterns and numbers. She sees them everywhere! There's symmetry in her garden, fractions in both her piano lessons and her kitchen, moonlit parallel lines that fall through her blinds; numbers and patterns are all around her. However, Maddie's love of all things mathematical sets her apart from her peers leaving her feeling different and alone. That is until Priya starts at her school and Dad organises a night-time playdate for the two girls. A trip to the observatory finds Maddie and Priya faced with an unfathomable number of stars, far too many to count. It's there, beneath the stary sky, that Maddie finds the perfect friend, one who shares her passion.

This book is recommended for readers aged between 5 and 10, although I think it could easily stretch beyond that range either way. Accompanied by the stunning illustrations of Australian illustrator Gabriel Evans, Raewyn Caisley's incredible story has so many layers to unpick that you could read this book time after time and still find something new to discuss. Perfect for introducing basic mathematical vocabulary to children and wonderful for discussing the concept of infinity, it also provides the opportunity to talk about feelings, friendships, helping others and following your passions.

*Count the Stars* is a beautifully written, gentle story. An absolute must for anyone who has a love of maths, or of any subject in fact, and who has ever felt a little different because of it. Its many layered themes make it simply perfect for primary school libraries. In fact, I've already ordered a second copy for just that purpose!

## **Tracey Corner**

### **Gina Kaminski Saves the Wolf**

Craig Barr-Green, illus. Francis Martin, pub. Little Tiger

Oh my goodness! I love this picture book. *Gina Kaminski Saves the Wolf* is a genius retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood* with a confident, empowering, autistic child leading us through. Simply put, every child can be the hero of their own story.

Craig Barr-Green writes the story from Gina's Kaminski's viewpoint, in first person, and it brings us even closer to Gina as a result, following her plan to subvert the story of *Red Riding Hood* and save

the wolf. And don't worry – if you wonder why Gina wants to save the wolf – she explains herself and her plan very clearly: there are Three Big Mistakes in the original story...but I won't give those away here! As well as allowing the reader to follow Gina's distinctive narrative lead, Barr-Green also makes use of pictorial emoji language as a way for Gina to describe how characters in the story make her feel. From start to finish, *Gina Kaminski Saves the Wolf* is empowering and inclusive, with a good dollop of magic thrown in. Francis Martin's illustration style is a heavy, pencil style with bright colours added that make the pages 'pop,' and it works brilliantly. Martin makes amazing use of the space on a page, the white background is never wasted, the characters and colour-popping objects are framed and held by the pages perfectly. The wolf, with its stark, black coat and tufty hairs sticking out appears a little confused and most non-threatening– but Gina soon finds a better home for him, which was her plan all along.

This book truly had me hooked from the start, I love a good retelling and this one is brilliant. It does all that I would want a retelling to do by challenging the traditional narratives we are told and subverting the story we know so well.

You will love this picture book if you like Bethan Woollvin's *Little Red*, and also *Rapunzel* – she too subverts those traditional narratives. And *Look Up* by Nathan Bryon, with the determined Rocket - a character, like Gina - who empowers her audience. Ideal for 3+, great reading at bedtime or anytime. A brilliant story that also promotes inclusivity and understanding. Don't pass Gina by!

**Anja Stobbart**

## **Imperfectly Perfect**

**Perry Emerson, illus. Hoang Giang, pub. Little Tiger**

*Imperfectly Perfect* is a gorgeously written picture book with a very important message, and that is to cherish the beauty in imperfection. Starting the story with an accidently ripped book and a subsequent sibling argument, Perry Emerson takes us on a journey with a little girl called Maria, as she learns that unique beauty can flourish from something seemingly flawed. Emerson writes in a gentle, meditative style which is perfect for bedtime and for leading the reader through this uplifting story. The ripped book that Maria tapes back together is not the only thing Imperfectly Perfect in this tale; there's also sibling arguments and love; the unexpected beauty of nature and a glimpse at the truth of aging. A story of how, things may break, fracture, wrinkle – shall we say change? - but then create something more beautiful, more telling, of more interest even of what went before.

Hoang Giang's illustrations are gently expressive, reflecting the events of the Maria's world wonderfully, but also the colour palate is warm and soothing, and as a reader you are drawn in. The colour yellow, or maybe it's gold - the colour that fills in all cracks in this story be it a broken bowl, pavement or lightening in the sky - is present on every page, which is a lovely subtle way to thread

each page together. Like one long strand of golden glue. The book warmed my heart as this is a story that we as adults must have heard in some form during our lives – it's such a lovely reminder of the importance of how we learn and grow, how to see and appreciate the unique beauty in the world around us and how precious that is.

Ideal for 3+, a great story to share between grown up and child, and brilliant to turn to when these very events need to be guided through – probably a regular occurrence for most of us as we all know breakages and arguments can happen every day - as does aging!

**Anja Stobbart**

## **The Magic of Me!**

**Ben Cort, pub. Hodder Children's Books**

The hero of this picture book imagines all the different ways that he can face the day. He can be brave; curious; creative; inventive, and caring. In fact, he can be anything that his imagination will allow.

In a world that is full of computers and facts, it is so good to have the ability to just dream about what you can potentially achieve during the day. Young children need to be reminded that the world is full of these wonders and that they can use their imagination to take them to different places and situations.

The story is told in rhyme, which really adds to the pace and flow of the text. There is also a range of emphasis in the words used, which helps a narrator when reading to a group of children. In fact, reading to yourself, you can feel the range of language and the impact it is likely to have on an audience.

Ben Cort has a very recognisable style of illustration; it is full of energy, colour and humour and there is a lot of detail which the audience can spend time investigating. I have a particular fondness for the tiger on the cover, but the dragon is also a favourite. Above all, this is a book that encourages the young reader to be proud of who they are and what they might achieve, both during the day, but also in the future. It is a lovely read for reception and beyond.

**Margaret Pemberton**

## **Meet Mim**

**Sandra Severgnini, pub. EK Books**

Young readers are taken on an underwater adventure while discovering a colourful array of sea creatures in the charming *Meet Mim* from award-winning author-illustrator Sandra Severgnini.

Through a unique reading experience, children get a glimpse of a mysterious creature on each page while trying to guess exactly what it is. Clever clues and lovely alliteration pull readers through the story and keep them turning pages to find out just what the fascinating animal could be. The satisfying ending introduces readers to a little-known sea creature and ties together all of the previous scenes beautifully. The lovely illustrations include adorable details – like a fish seeing its own reflection in a bubble – that will bring a smile to readers. On follow-up readings, children can take a closer look at the sandy, seabed scenes to find hints of what’s to come and discover just how the crafty creature disguises itself each time.

I thoroughly enjoyed the unique reading experience of *Meet Mim*. It was a fun guessing game that kept me intrigued through the book and piqued my curiosity about this curious creature. The story inspired me to want to learn more. Luckily, the publisher, EK Books, offers a comprehensive document, Teaching Notes and Resources, that includes plenty of additional information and activities to be used by educators for furthering learning. Overall, *Meet Mim* is a wonderful book to introduce children to the wonders of the sea and especially its crafty protagonist.

**Stephanie Ward**

## **The Most Famous Rhinoceros**

**Dianne Hofmeyr, illus. Simona Mulazzani, pub. Otter Barry Books**

Princess Beatrix is excited to meet the amazing one-horned creature that has been sent as a gift to her father, the King of Portugal. Could it be a unicorn she wonders? All too soon we, and Beatrix learn that the new animal is not a unicorn – it’s a rhinoceros called Genda. We learn that Genda has travelled all the way from India, and Beatrix immediately loves him. She becomes Genda’s friend and protector, determined to persuade her father the King that this wild creature should be returned to his jungle home.

This is a beautifully written book. Beatrix is an interesting character, she isn’t your typical princess, with her wild hair and amazing collection of wild animals. When she is given a Rhinoceros as a gift, she is disappointed to start with (well she was expecting a unicorn!), but it’s not long before she falls in love with it. When her brothers start to squabble, as brothers so, about the animals, the king announces a battle between Genda and an Elephant. Terrified, Beatrix realises that the best place for the Rhino is back in the wild. But that means saying goodbye...

Animal lovers will applaud Beatrix’s caring attitude and desire to have her father’s ‘gift’ returned to his wild home. Simona Mulazzani’s richly wonderful illustrations beautifully capture the period in

which the events are set, making the telling even more poignant. This story is based on a true story. Genda is remembered today because of printmaker Albrecht Durer. In 1515 he drew a sketch of what he thought Genda looked like, and those who hadn't had the chance to meet Genda got to know him through these drawings. To this day if you visit the Vatican and look up you will find a print of Genda.

**Helen Byles**

## **Peace On Earth**

**Smriti Halls, illus. David Litchfield, pub. Walker Books**

A dreamy cover, full moon shining brightly with friends sitting together encapsulating what Peace on Earth really means. This beautifully illustrated book by award winning author and artist David Litchfield, coupled with the enchanting verse of the critically acclaimed children's author Smriti Halls, creates a magical space for diving deeply into the inner and outer landscapes of the selves we inhabit. It encourages us to see what it is inside us that can help us to create the Peace we seek here on Earth.

The story opens with evocative words, chosen to guide the reader to an understanding of the meaning of peace in a human life which coexists symbiotically with nature:

"Peace on Earth...GOOD WILL TO ALL!  
From rivers deep to mountains tall,  
A wave to neighbours near and far,  
A wish upon a morning star."

As we move through this versified tale, beautiful and alluring illustrations draw our senses to engage with the emotions of the characters. We follow them through general feelings of goodwill to others, through negative emotions before coming to forgiveness and gratitude again. All the while we are drawing in the hope that dawns within and shines outside.

This picturebook would make a lovely night-time story for children aged 7-11 and the illustrations can be utilised as artwork for ruminations upon the meaning of human life. It is a really beautiful book that uses straightforward language and forms it into poetry. It's easy to understand the profound messages it presents. I'd certainly give it a 5/5 and recommend you pick it up.

**Ishika Tiwari**

## **We Went to Find a Woolly Mammoth**

**Catherine Cawthorne, illus. Aysha Awwad, pub. Hodder Children's Books**



Have you ever seen a woolly mammoth? Well in this delightfully funny and fascinating story we join a group of children on an expedition to find one of these creatures. We know from certain films that they were alive during the ice age, but where can these intrepid explorers find them?

They have a checklist of what to look for and are wearing their boots and thick coats, so hopefully they are prepared. The children meet a huge range of animals, from sabre-toothed cats to giant armadillos as they wander through the landscape, but they never seem to be able to find the elusive Woolly Mammoth. Finally, they come across a creature that ticks all the attributes on their list; yes, it is a mammoth, or rather a group of four. So, our band can go home and snuggle in front of the fire.

This is a wonderful look into the imagination of children and their adults, as they turn a walk through nature into something far more adventurous which involves learning about the ice age and its inhabitants. The illustrations are full of detail and the creatures are recognisable, although thankfully not as fierce as they would have been in real life! The book works at several levels; firstly, it is a look the ice age for the very young reader, then it links to the fact that many of our present-day animals can be traced back to these ancestors. Finally, this inspires KS1 children to look at the world around them and feel the connections they can form with a distant past.

**Margaret Pemberton**

## **Wolf and Bear**

**Kate Rolfe, pub. Two Hoots (imprint of Macmillan Children's Books)**

More and more schools are using books to help children understand the world around them. This includes difficult subjects such as feelings and relationships. They have a way of making children understand and usually they can explain things better than adults!

*Wolf and Bear* does this and more. It is a heartfelt story about a playful young wolf and her best friend, Bear. The two best friends always play together, whether it's paddling in the stream, skidding in the snow, or tumbling in the falling leaves. But sometimes Bear feels sad and wants to be alone ...

This is such a beautiful story. It tells the story of two friends who are completely different characters. Not only that but as you get further into the story you start to see that Bear struggles with low moods. Of course, Bear isn't able to find a way to explain this to Wolf and as a result Wolf begins to feel lonely. She also feels sad, feeling that she has done something wrong and upset Bear. Wolf finds comfort in singing to herself and the sound travels through the woods. Bear hears the sounds and it makes him feel a bit happier so he follows it to its source – Wolf! From that moment on Wolf sings to Bear whenever his friend needs it.

This book shows us that we don't have to do much to be a good friend and that it's the simple things in life that can make someone happy. A touching story told with empathy and emotion. This is a book for our times that will help parents to be able to discuss feelings of loneliness or low mood with their children. The author has a sensitivity for the subject and demonstrates beautifully how important good friends are. A must for school libraries.

**Helen Byles**

# Junior Books

## **Butterfly Wings**

**Samuel Larochelle, illus. Eve Patenaude, trans. Arielle Aaronson, pub. Greystone Kids**

Florent is a ten-year-old boy. He lives with his two loving mothers and, initially, he is a very energetic and noisy child. However, when he accidentally overhears his mothers talking about how they should not have another baby because of the state of the planet, Florent experiences an anxiety that quickly becomes overwhelming and debilitating.

Florent believes he is taking up space and that he is not worthy of it. His mothers do not know the reason for his anxiety and cannot help it stop before it reaches a crescendo and he becomes unable to speak, falling into depression. When his mums eventually find out the cause of his problems, they tell him that yes, the climate situation is serious but that the world needs more children as they will be able to take on a fresh perspective and think of new ways to ameliorate the situation.

The depiction of the grip of anxiety which Florent experiences is hauntingly painful in its accuracy. It would be helpful to children, experiencing any type of anxiety, to see Patenaude's depiction. *Butterfly Wings* could gently open up discussions between child reader and their adults which could be fruitful for all. Aaronson's translation flows seamlessly and is sensitive around very difficult topics.

## **Rebecca Butler**

## **Cloudlanders**

**Christopher Mackie, pub. Kelpies (an imprint of Floris Books)**

The Wavewrecker, a monstrous sea monster, is close to achieving its ultimate goal of death and destruction: finally destroying Bastion, the last civilisation remaining, floating in the sky. Bastion has survived thanks to the miraculous discovery of lightstone, a silvery stone so light that it floats in the air. Ever since its discovery the Cloudlanders have lived safely high in the sky. But now Bastion is gradually descending to a watery grave.

*Cloudlanders* is a great story. The story unfolds dramatically and briskly as different characters, in different places, making different decisions, fuse into a kaleidoscope of action. Moreover, there is a hidden backstory to the main characters that they are unable or too afraid to reveal, and yet together, these backstories could save the day. Of course, there are genuine friendships and family relationships, causing calamity - the ominous Tidekin is a tricky nemesis - but it is the firm bond that cements the group as the jeopardy increases.

Our heroes really make the story. In order of appearance, the Gemstone Faerie Flicker; a fungi Shroomling called Kurt; the mechanical boy and outsider One-Zero; missing child Serena; orphan sister and brother and wood nymphs Aliana and Garrett and the shaping-changing Therian, Lycan. We get to know the characters through the twists and turns of the story, with plenty of nagging doubts about this unlikely collection of heroes, which are gradually answered. The friendships are heart-warming, such as my favourite between One-Zero with his limited words and Garrett who surprisingly learns to understand him. The villains are of course dastardly. The Boy sells out his friend, and is incredibly evil, intending to make her stay with him forever in the endless ocean. Paladin Flint, betrays all that he is meant to uphold to tighten his grip on his power. He just won't die!

*Cloudlanders* is a breath of fresh air in fantasy writing. Open the book at your peril however, because inside it is a tornado of a read.

**Simon Barrett**

## **Dreamweavers: Night of the Scary Fairies**

**Anabelle Sami, illus. Forrest Burdett, pub. Little Tiger**

I love it when a new series is announced. I love it when there are new characters to meet, new places to visit and new adventures to be had. So, when *Dreamweavers* was announced I knew this was going to be something special.

Meet the ultimate Dream Team! When Tito becomes friends with the mysterious new girl at school, Neena, she introduces him to the world of Dreamweaving. Soon Tito and Neena are going on adventures every night – exploring dreams where quirky creatures called Jinn roam. And when their classmates start acting strangely, they realize someone else is using Dreamweaving to cause chaos. Can Tito and Neena stop them before the dream world takes over the waking world?

Tito is a very sensitive character and only feels comfortable with his two close friends, so when his class teacher tasks him with looking after the new girl Neena, Tito decides to research her homeland so that they can have something to talk about. When they know each other better Neena tells Tito that he is exactly like her - a Dreamweaver. Dreamweavers are people who can control their dreams, they can also go into each other's dreams. They soon discover that the Jinn are playing tricks on their friends, getting into dreams and causing all sorts of problems at school. Neena and Tito must work out what is happening to their friends and then create a plan to rescue them all.

This is a magnificent first book in the series, and this series promises to be amazing. The characters are interesting, and diverse. The storyline is something I've not come across before, and much of this

book was setting the scene for the series to come. Very exciting! I am really looking forward to seeing where this series goes in the future.

## **Helen Byles**

### **The Final Year**

**Matt Goodfellow, illus. Joe Todd-Stanton, pub. Otter Barry Books**

*The Final Year* is the first novel told in verse for middle grade readers and the first full length novel by poet, and former primary school teacher, Matt Goodfellow. Beautifully illustrated by the talented Joe Todd Stanton, this is an important book to both savour and treasure.

The story follows the turbulent final year at primary school of Nate, the sensitive yet stoical hero who constantly battles to overcome “the beast” inside himself. Life is tough for Nate, with an absent father, two lively younger brothers and a mother who struggles with alcohol and is barely out of childhood herself. Nate seems to hold the family together and if this wasn’t tough enough, his best friend PS becomes friends with the school bully leaving Nate to cope with looming SATS and all the pressures of the final year on his own. Just as Nate is coming to terms with this betrayal, his youngest brother Dylan is rushed to hospital with his life in the balance.

However, to quote Mr Joshua, Nate’s inspirational and supportive teacher, “all is not lost”. Nate forges a new friendship with the equally sensitive and artistic Caleb and learns to find his place, and his voice in the world.

I approached this book with trepidation due to the references to *Skellig*, one of my all-time favourites, as I was worried it wouldn’t live up to this classic. However, Matt has used this inspiration to produce a beautiful and compelling story which explores universal themes of family, friendship and identity and is sure to become a classic of our times.

## **Janet Ling**

### **Finding Wonder**

**Lauren St John, illus. Levi Pinfold & Marie-Alice Harel, pub. Faber & Faber**

Fans of Lauren St John’s previous books will know how beautifully she writes. If you’ve not yet read one yet, then *Finding Wonder* would be the perfect place to start! This book throws you immediately into the chaos of horse mad, 12-year-old Roo’s life. In the first few pages we learn that her mother is dead, and her father isn’t coping particularly well with being a single parent. When her father dies unexpectedly Roo finds herself orphaned with only her mother’s sister to care for her. Aunt Joni

hasn't been much of an aunt to Roo so far, she's more used to travelling the globe in her camper van, and it looks set to be a bumpy ride for both of them.

In a strange twist of fate, a lottery ticket Roo's father bought before he died turns out to be a winning one and Roo sets out to buy herself the real horse her father had always promised her, if ever they won. Roo finds the perfect horse for her in Wonder Boy, but he mysteriously vanishes before she even gets the chance to buy him, leaving Roo and Joni thrown into solving the mystery of his disappearance.

Lauren St John has an intrinsic understanding of the bonds between both humans and animals and writes about them in a heartfelt and powerful way. Add to this her innate ability to describe a setting, bringing the story to life, and you feel you can both see and feel just as her characters do.

Marvellously plotted with enough twists and turns to keep you guessing right up to the end this story was an absolute joy to read and was difficult to put down. Aimed at readers 9+ the story deals sensitively with the subject of grief and is a masterclass in superb storytelling! One of my favourite books this year!

## **Tracey Corner**

### **I Am the Wind. Irish Poems for Children Everywhere Lucinda Jacob and Sarah Webb, illus. Ashwin Chacko, pub. Little Island Books**

Autumn is setting in with its mystery and magic being dispersed into the air, which turns warm or cold depending on its mood. The surroundings are clearer, crisper, and cuddling with a light blanket and warm tea, I am reading this green and summery anthology of Irish Poems edited by Lucinda Jacob and Sarah Webb.

Full of light-hearted poems wafting their Irish essence through the air as the reader wades through these 100+ poems in the comfort of their own room or outside on the sunny lawn, the collection is truly a joy. The editors have successfully incorporated the flavours and moods of Irish life with the inclusion of poems from well-known poets such as WB Yeats, Louise C. Callaghan, Oscar Wilde and modern, budding ones. This is a truly diverse collection of poems talking about magical doorways; warrior queens; the beauty of memories; earthworms; blackberry picking; folk tales; writing; pugs and much more. Here's one in both languages-

Ar Iarraidh ...

AR IARRAIDH  
ochtapas: má fheiceann tú é

glaoigh ar un Uisceadán!

Escaped ...

ESCAPED

octopus: if spotted,  
ring Aquarium

Each poem carries both a unique theme and essence which enhances the understanding of the reader new to Irish culture, words, songs, food, habits etc. It can equally be enjoyed by those already acquainted with Ireland and its beauty. Carry it, recite it, read it quietly or out loud; keep it in your bag or upon the bedside table this one will spread its colours no matter where it is. It can be easily read and understood by children aged 8-15, some of the sound poems and picture narratives can be utilised by parents of children aged 4+ too. Keep this in your library, you'll love it.

**Ishika Tiwari**

## **In the Shadow of the Wolf Queen**

**Kiran Millwood Hargrave, pub. Hachette Children's Group**

*In the Shadow of the Wolf Queen* is the first title in a proposed trilogy – the Geomancer Trilogy.

Ysolda is twelve and one day she goes home to her stone house where she lives with her beloved sister, Hari in a small, rural village, only to find that an earthquake has destroyed their home. Hari, who has a gift for listening to trees and understanding their messages, has been taken prisoner by the feared Wolf Queen. Ysolda must unite with her enemy in order to reunite with her sister. She must also discover the Queen's reason for taking hostages. All too soon she finds herself on a quest for magic that is far more powerful and far more dangerous than she could have ever imagined.

The strengths of this novel lie in the relationship of Ysolda and Hari and also the bonds Ysolda forms with two kinds of animal, a sea hawk she names Nara and the Wolf Queen's wolves. Animal lovers will rejoice in the depths of the relationships and how the animal characters seem to leap off the page and are easily visualised by the reader.

This book is a love letter to nature and encourages the reader to think about their role in protecting our world for the future.

**Rebecca Butler**

## **Kevin the Vampire: A Most Mysterious Monster**

**Matt Brown, illus. Flavia Sorrentino, pub. Nosy Crow**

*Kevin the Vampire: A Most Mysterious Monster* follows a ten-year-old vampire named Kevin, and Susie, a normal human who happens to live in the most boring town to ever exist.

When Kevin, his family, and a group of friendly and talented monsters arrive at a town called Lower Drudging rather than the highly anticipated Festival of Fear, they decide the only thing they can do is put on a show. But, thanks to the You-Know-What destroying the town a long time ago, Lower Drudging does not like monsters, shows, or anything fun. Except for Susie, who just wishes she could run away from her boring life in Lower Lower Drudging (Upper Lower Drudging is far more fun).

This book is filled with unique illustrations every few pages and creative chapter titles that will make you want to read on. There is also a map of Lower Drudging, which features many locations with comical names such as ‘Bank of No Interest’, ‘No Toppings Pizzeria’, and ‘The Cold Toast Shop’. Readers can also find an alphabet at the back of the book, which is centred around monsters. Matt Brown has created an imaginative range of monsters (mostly harmless, except for the Killer Bunnies and the Deadly Unicorns of Death) that have their own unique fact files featured at the beginning of chapters. One of these monsters includes Dog, who is Kevin’s pet and is not actually a dog.

This book is perfect for 7 – 9-year-old readers who love adventure books with a bit of humour mixed in. People will surely love the characters and might even relate to how Kevin struggles to fit in or how Susie longs for adventure. Overall, I believe that Matt Brown and Flavia Sorrentino did a great job on this book, and it is definitely worth reading.

**Mya Grant (aged 10)**

**The Shade Tree**

**Suzy Lee, trans. Helen Mixter, pub. Greystone Kids**

*The Shade Tree* presents us with a short Korean folk story and its underlying message. Written by critically acclaimed artist and author Suzy Lee and translated by the equally talented Helen Mixter, this little story about a tree in a field with its natural shade, a traveller and a village, feels like a soothing little tale with a message for all.

The minimalist green and purple illustrations along with Suzy Lee’s words manage to encapsulate the concepts and practices of environmentalism, human greed, capitalism, consumerism. They also remind us of the need to continue protecting and caring for the gifts mother earth has given us. Additionally, we begin to understand that nature cannot be controlled by one or the other. It’s free and for all. Upon opening the book, the reader enters the world of the ubiquitous tree of the title. It is



clear on every page, it being so very green, and the story revolves around it. "Once upon a time, in a village, there was a huge, old tree..."

A weary traveller decides to rest in the shade of the tree, but it stands on a rich man's field and he questions the traveller about his intentions before allowing the man to rest. Finally, the shade is sold to the traveller so that he can rest in it as many times and for as long as he wishes. The traveller goes on to allow the local villagers to participate in the resting because now he owns the shade cast by the tree. It is from here that the story takes funny turns, which you really will enjoy, it really is incredibly clever!

*The Shade Tree* is a charming fable with an important message. It can be enjoyed by both children and adults equally, would make a lovely bedtime story or gift to any book lover.

**Ishika Tiwari**

## **The Silver Road**

**Sinéad O'Hart, pub. Piccadilly Press**

Thirteen-year-old Rosaleen Darke thought she was living a normal teenage life complete with relentless bullies, busy parents, and a lonely existence at a new school. But all that changes one sleepless night when she is delivered a magical red stone by the ancient frost giant, Sioc. For Rose has been chosen to fight the evil witch, Cethlenn, who is desperate to bring her beloved (though terrible) husband Balor, back from the dead. To do this, she must find her way through the labyrinth of the Silver Road with the help of a long forgotten Irish elk, an enchanted couple who knows the ways of old magic and her nemesis, Emer, the bully who took the stone from her. With a large dose of Celtic folklore and a bewitching cast of characters, *The Silver Road* is a fantasy adventure like no other.

Deftly moving between contemporary life and the mystical world of gods and magical creatures, O'Hart paints a compelling portrait of a typical young teen who rises to the challenges she is presented with. At the same time, she tells an ancient tale based on Irish mythology full of vengeful gods, intriguing animals and dying magic. In a clever plot twist Rose's father's job is closely linked to the destruction of her town which also connects the school bully directly to Rose bringing both new and old, school and family, together. While her world is falling apart, both literally and figuratively, Rose discovers an inner strength and believes that she's the only one that can stop the Silver Road from disappearing forever.

I thoroughly enjoyed the unique blend of Irish folklore with modern life in this exciting, adventure story. I loved that young Rose was curious about the old world – from the elderly couple whom she befriended, to the dedication she felt for her beloved grandmother and to the old magic that she experienced in the town. Through Rose's openness to understanding the past she was able to find a

strength within, one that was buried under contemporary struggles. This uplifting, entertaining story addresses environmental issues as well and speaks to the changing world around us.

Young readers will find a highly imaginative setting with larger-than-life villains and fascinating creatures in this page-turning middle grade novel. Together with an underdog protagonist and the fate of the old world in her hands, *The Silver Road* is an enjoyable read.

**Stephanie Ward**

## **The Stars Did Wander Darkling**

**Colin Meloy, pub. Walker Books**

This story starts in sleepy Seaham, a quiet seaside town where nothing ever happens. It is a very small town, the type you would find in 1980s Oregon and gives the story a hint of nostalgia. In this town is a community with a video store, before the days of streaming, downloading and mobile phones. The period setting will be unfamiliar to the target audience, but many will find it interesting and fascinating to be introduced to and become part of a different period.

In addition to the atmospheric and creepy setting, the characters are a real strength of this novel. Four childhood friends are planning their summer camp trip. They set off for the woods on their bikes. As the story develops, odd things start to happen. Has Archie been watching too many horror films? The friendships develop throughout the story, as the young friends try to solve a very thrilling and intense mystery. Archie has a terrible feeling, and his friend Oliver is plagued by horrible visions. This all adds up to a good, fun-filled read, which is full of action and definitely creepy.

Even worse than the problems the children are having we discover that the adults of the town are starting to act strangely. What is happening in the community? Ordinary things become sinister, like a penny on a doormat or a man in a brown suit standing under a streetlamp. Adults play a significant part in the story. Has Archie's dad unlocked some awful terror beneath the town? Has the construction company opened up and disturbed something sinister in the cliffs under the old Langdon place?

Readers will enjoy the creepy fun, the horror, and the suspense, as well as the bizarre goings on. The interesting title and the delightful book cover will also attract readers to this novel. Can the children stop whatever it is before it is too late? What horror is lurking under the town of Seaham?

**Gary Kenworthy**

## **The Vanquishers**

## **Kalynn Bayron, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books**

Do you believe in vampires, and I don't mean the small flying bat type. I do. I think there are vampires out there, living among us all, that they are not truly extinct. After all there are so many stories featuring them how could they not be real? Maybe you think that all the hype, all the stories I have read have finally turned my brain and I am imagining things, but can I let you into a secret? You have to promise to keep it just between us. I have written proof that vampires are far from extinct...

It comes in the form of a book that Bloomsbury Children's Books sent me. Written by Kalynn Bayron it's called *The Vanquishers* and whilst I am sure you can find it at all good bookstores make sure not to tell anyone that you are reading it to find out the truth about vampires – that is our secret remember? Would you like to know a little more about it... Well, its title is a nod to a mythical group of vampire hunters. They were true heroes who supposedly wiped-out vampires, decades ago it is said. Now they are idolised by people like you and I as well as Malika Wilson and her friends. After all they supposedly rescued us from the need for garlic, early curfews and all sorts of other inconveniences vampires created. Are you curious yet? Good because there is more. One of Malika's friends has gone missing. That is not all. Strange things have been happening.

There are oddly shifting shadows, creepy creatures everywhere and more vampire bats than usual. Malika, unlike you and I, is not yet ready to admit that vampires may not have been vanquished, she just wants to save her friend. You and I know however that we need to call in the Vanquishers and this story is going to show us just why they are still so important. Thrilling, heartfelt, feisty and a brilliant read this is just the first in a new series of stories to reassure us all that vampires are indeed real but that the Vanquishers are only ever a call away...

## **Louise Ellis-Barrett**

# Young Adult Books

## **Are We There Yet?**

**David Levithan, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books**

A YA novel which remains in print for the best part of twenty years must have a reason for its long active life. *Are We There Yet?* certainly has plenty of reasons, and its author David Levithan has offered us a fistful (actually several fistfuls) of equally excellent teenage material. It's notable also that his writing for gay teenagers has been recognised and rewarded with several US literary awards.

Danny and Elijah are brothers, Danny the elder by seven years, while Elijah is about to start his Senior year at High School. Until Elijah was ten, he and Danny were inseparable, and Danny loved his little brother, but since then they have drifted further and further apart. When their parents craftily arranged a foreign holiday just for them, they hoped that the two boys would become friends again, but both siblings face the ten days in Italy promised to them as an appalling thought. They are each very different, with Danny, although he's a successful businessman, quite self-contained and nervous, and Elijah far more outgoing and often quite scatter-brained. Arriving in Italy they meet Julia, a Canadian in her early twenties, whose Italian tour happens to coincide with theirs, and who Elijah swiftly falls for, despite having a 'not a girlfriend' at home on the East Coast. Danny is also attracted to Julia, and Levithan makes their different approaches to her a fascinating theme towards the end of the novel.

This is a wonderful book – insightful, truly describing the different people siblings can become, and showing us that there was a way for Danny and Elijah to mend their rift when they were certain neither could love the other again. The chapters are short (two sentences on occasion) and simply written, but so carefully thought through, and so true. Levithan's writing is incredibly careful, almost poetic, yet down to earth and utterly true to life. This is a heart-warming novel which will ring true with so many YA readers with siblings. I'm convinced many readers will emerge much happier from their reading and find the answer to the title is a heartfelt 'yes.'

## **Bridget Carrington**

### **Babushka**

**Natasha Devon, pub. UCLan Publishing**

Despite its title *Babushka* is not a novel about life in Russia! Instead, we read the tale of sixteen-year-old Cerys, who is being brought up in Wales, with her family. Most notable is her strict Mam who disapproves of almost everything Cerys does. Cerys' Da is more easy-going, but reluctant to challenge

his wife's strict household regime. Cerys is determined to go to Art College in London, to study fashion, and she and her father have negotiated with Wyn, Mam's sister, for Cerys to live with her while she studies. We'd hardly believe that Wyn is Mam's sister unless we had been told. She is so very different in all respects, always wearing a kaftan and turban, and enjoying an outgoing life.

Wyn is sympathetic with Cerys' determination to study in London, and to experience a totally different life to that which she's been used to as only child in her Mam's Welsh household. Arriving in London Cerys realises how different life is there, and her differences stand out, making her a target to be bullied by a student clique in the Art College. They make fun of her background, her Welsh accent, and her social innocence. Tricked into various situations which result in problems with her College tutors, she meets and falls for a temporary tutor, but ultimately discovers that their relationship is far from ideal, though not before she faces a decision which changes her life.

The author opens and closes the novel with Cerys' life change, and how this, and her aunt's illness, offer her options which may allow her a second chance. Through the range of experiences Cerys has, Natalia Devon gives her readers the opportunity to think about their own reactions and life decisions. Varying from exciting, desperate, distraught and, at times, terrified, Cerys must come to terms with situations which are forced on her by the behaviour of others, but also situations which she, often through ignorance, but sometimes through sheer pig-headedness, has allowed to happen. This is a novel which invites readers to examine their own situations, their behaviour, and the lives they hope to lead. Seriously thoughtful, but also often seriously funny, this is a hopeful, sympathetic, and endearing novel.

## **Bridget Carrington**

### **Champion of Fate**

**Kendare Blake, pub. Oneworld Publications**

*Champion of Fate* is the latest offering from Kendare Blake and has all her hallmarks of strong 'world building' and her ability to create an immediate affinity between the reader and the places and people she introduces. Fans of the *Three Dark Crowns* series will recognise some of the geography of her new tale, but the characters and concept are all new, so the book does not need you to have read any others to be appreciated.

We are introduced to Reed as the book begins, a foundling child who witnesses great cruelty before finding a new home with an order of female warriors – the Aristene. These warriors have almost mythological status as bringers of glory and often, but not always, victory to those they support in battle. They are feared, honoured, and in some countries seen as legends. As Reed comes of age and undertakes her final trial to be accepted into the order, she faces changes and shifts in her friendships.

She questions her purpose and destiny and must battle between her duty and her feelings, for the first 'hero' that she must champion is someone who has also stolen her heart.

I thought at first that the story was going to follow the well-trodden path of hero development, but Blake manages to keep the reader guessing and it would not do to be complacent about the storyline as she has a few twists and turns to keep the pace and narrative moving along well. The book reads as a stand-alone, but I suspect could easily be the start of a new series of books that follow Reed and the Aristene warriors. I would look forward to another if Kendare Blake does continue this series. She has certainly created and captured a good story here, with potential for more.

**Marianne Degiovanni**

## **Every Exquisite Thing**

**Laura Stevens, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books**

Do you ever find yourself enraptured with the idea of perfect beauty forever? For Penny Paxton, this feeling, paired with the pressure of her mother's legacy, causes her to enrol in the dangerous Dorian Drama Academy, where her mother found her fame.

At this school, Penny faces the brutal and competitive side of acting and drama. There are secrets, lies and dark, twisted actions. At this school everyone will fight to the extreme to be the best. When Penny lands the lead role in the school's production of 'Macbeth' after blackmailing her teacher so that the lead role was not given to her rival Davina, her mentor reveals to her the wicked truth of how she and so many other actors and actresses have been able to stay young and beautiful. Penny follows in her mentor's footsteps and is painted by an artist known as the Masked Painter who traps people in their beautiful bodies. She swiftly regrets her actions after her mentor is found murdered. Not only that there are violent slashes across her own painting and as the story progresses more people are found murdered or with new scars that have no obvious explanation.

*Every Exquisite Thing* offers a compelling and thrilling read with dark, twisted actions woven between its words. Inspired by Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, this is billed as a feminist retelling of the classic. Laura Stevens carefully covers difficult topics and addresses the pain many of those seeking stardom, or trying to impress their parents, face. It is wicked and brutal, but I enjoyed it and found myself unable to put it down due to my desperation to know how it ended, and whether anyone at the school would be safe by the end. It beautifully explored the strive for perfection and identity many, particularly young people seeking fame in the arts, face each day and the competitive atmosphere that causes destruction to so many people's dreams.

**Gemma Walford**

## **I Feed Her to the Beast and the Beast is Me**

**Jamison Shea, pub. Hot Key Books**

*I Feed Her to the Beast and the Beast is Me* is definitely allied more towards ballet films like the 2010 psychological horror movie *Black Swan*, and not for those enthusiasts of the more usual ballet genre, who are more familiar with the school of Noel Streatfeild's *Ballet Shoes*!

Jamison Shea's YA horror novel drips with blood and with characters who shape-shift in a version of the classical underworld. To be fair, the author's introductory note clearly warns potential readers that the object of this novel is not a pretty tale of ballet dancing life, but that it is for teenage entertainment, and especially for readers who relish depictions of blood, bones, corpses, ritualistic self-harm, body-shaming, torture, and murder! This said, the first part of the book provides readers with fairly extensive descriptions of life in an elite ballet company and the Opera Garnier theatre. It's an exhausting life, and it's clear that our heroine, Laure, is not welcome in the ballet circle, as a working-class girl of colour. Quite apart from the gothic horror, Shea's portrayal is of a teenager from a rough area, with a mother who abandoned her, and a father who largely ignores his daughter.

Laure has long since left home and shares an apartment with her best friend Coralie who is also an aspiring dancer, despite Coralie's background being that of a girl from an extremely rich family. A visit to the catacombs, in order to overcome the problems of her current life, offers Laure the chance to engage in a supernatural world in which appalling violence takes place. Looking beneath the gothic horror story readers can identify the underlying psychological damage experienced by a girl whose background is, in all respects, alien to that of the other students. They will also see the world she so desperately wishes to be part of, whatever the sacrifices she may have to make. Shea offers us a book with a deeply thoughtful example of the confused aspirations of a teenage girl who seems not to fit into 'normal' life.

The author's dedication is 'to those who find freedom in becoming a monster when denied the space to be human.' Readers will be delighted to see that Laure's life continues in a second novel.

## **Bridget Carrington**

### **The Love Report**

**Beka (Caroline Roque and Bertrand Escaich), illus. Maya (Martina Mura), pub. Hippo Park**

Despite being best friends, for Grace and Lola navigating their way through high school is a complicated business. In particular they have to consider the issue of how to deal successfully with the topic of relationships... Easy – create a love report detailing everything you find out about your class

mates' love lives. Who likes who; the hot spots for meeting up; who has broken up with who and why... the list goes on. But, despite interviewing, spying on and upsetting their classmates in the name of research, both reach the overwhelming conclusion that love is tough.

*The Love Report* is the latest collaboration by French writers Caroline Roque and Bertrand Escaich who have teamed up with Italian born Manga artist, Martina Mura, to create the first in a new series of graphic novels featuring the two best friends Grace and Lola, and their classmates. There is much in this book to commend. It discusses difficult issues that are all too real in high schools such as peer pressure, and negative group culture which sees young people labelled as 'cool' or 'nerdy.' Then there is the fear faced by many young people who are desperate to 'fit in.' Importantly for the reader the characters show some depth in their attempt to challenge stereotypes. The 'pretty' girl liked by all the boys hates the attention and hides herself away to read science books; the rebel with a reputation has a real heart. Lola and Grace's relationship also has some refreshing qualities. Grace is of colour and struggling at home due to her parents' constant arguments; Lola lives with her single mom. Another strength is the illustrations which are eye-catching and bold with some beautiful attention to detail. The only drawback is the tiny typeface used for the letter of advice from Lola's mom which concludes the novel.

*The Love Report* is a sweet story which will younger teens, particularly those beginning to navigate secondary school. The concluding message is very powerful in asserting the need to love and be loved but not at the expense of being true to oneself – or one's friends. At times though it can feel a little disorientated in terms of audience and content. Whilst the subject of love is a theme which definitely resonates with most teens, the absence of more developed and nuanced characters and storylines may not engage an older audience.

## **Paulie Hurry**

### **Play**

**Luke Palmer, pub. Firefly Press**

Matthew, Mark, Luc and Johnny (I only realised the biblical connotations when I wrote that down) are four friends and *Play* is their story told from each of their four perspectives.

Matthew is an artist and has a secret that his friends have guessed, but not all of them have accepted. Mark's family is poor and he's vulnerable to the influence of his older brother's acquaintances when they start paying him for small favours that escalate into something more dangerous. Luc is a gifted athlete, but his dad is a bully and pushes him too hard. Johnny is wild, destructive, and brilliant but is neglected by his parents.



The opening line of the book tells us: “Everyone’s setting their socks on fire.” It soon appears that this is just one of the games the boys play. The story spans several years, from their more innocent games - building dens and then tearing them down in the summer following Year 7; to the riskier games the boys engage in as they enter Year 9. By the end of the book the wilderness where they built dens as children has become a landfill dump and their new games have a disastrous consequence. The ending is truly transcendent as, during a watershed moment, the characters meditate on all the possible futures they could have, depending on the choices that they make; one final game.

What I loved about this book is that these four boys are not heroes or underdogs - they’re four ordinary boys from working class families, living in a small town, dealing with their own battles, in their own way, and with the support of each other.

The author is a secondary school teacher, and this is very apparent in his astute and empathetic portrayal of these formative years. *Play* is an incredibly authentic, and deeply moving, coming-of-age story about boys’ friendship, choices, and consequences. Highly recommended for readers aged 13+.

**Rebecca Rouillard**

## **Sisters of Sword and Shadow**

**Laura Bates, pub. Simon & Schuster Children’s Books**

On the day of her older sister’s wedding Cass is robbed and then rescued by a dashing knight who turns out to be a woman. Cass is introduced to the Sisters of Sword and Shadow - a self-sufficient household of women who have secretly trained to fight and defend their community. But the most important rule of the sisterhood is that the women must all keep their identities concealed as the world is not ready for female knights.

Cass leaves behind the domestic life that was planned out for her and embarks upon her training as a squire to Sigrid - the knight who rescued her. But the evil Sir Mordaunt, owner of the neighbouring land, is determined to oppress and subdue all those around him. Will the sisterhood be able to protect them without compromising their secret?

*Sisters of Sword and Shadow* is a feminist retelling of the Arthurian legend, set in the land of Mercia. Arthur’s knights do make an appearance in this story, but they are not the honourable heroes in shining armour that the legends make them out to be. The setting feels well researched and developed - the backdrop of Medieval England is rendered in precise detail. The pacing however is a little slow and the protagonist seems younger than her seventeen years, although the darker themes that emerge later do age the story up. The primary action is concentrated in the final pages of the book and the ending is tremendously exciting, but the climactic moment slips by almost unnoticed.

While this author is a successful and experienced writer, the YA fantasy category is incredibly demanding and, sadly, I don't think this book has the depth and complexity to measure up to some other books inspired by Arthurian legend, like the dark and thrilling *Guinevere Deception* trilogy by Kiersten White or the charming *Gwen & Art are Not in Love* by Lex Croucher. Having said that, *Sisters of Sword and Shadow* is an engaging, feminist fantasy, perfect for fans of the BBC's 'Merlin,' and I'm sure it will appeal to younger teens.

**Rebecca Rouillard**

## **Suddenly a Murder**

**Lauren Muñoz, pub. Hot Key Books**

*Suddenly a Murder* by Lauren Muñoz is a gripping young adult novel that skilfully weaves together elements of wealthy privilege, immigration issues, and teen drama. It does all this within the setting of an intriguing murder mystery, making it a must-read for anyone looking for a captivating story.

The story opens with a group of extremely privileged teens embarking on a graduation celebration trip, introducing us to the central character, Izzy. She, and her best friend Cassidy, love the 1920s and murder mysteries, and Cassidy has planned a trip to the historic Ashwood Manor where their group of 7 friends spend the weekend living out their 20's flapper dreams, complete with costumes, catering, and no cell phones. But when one of them, Blaine, is murdered the weekend leads to friend-against-friend accusations and secrets unravelling. What sets Izzy apart from her friends is her working-class background and scholarship status at the school. Izzy's role as a responsible sister to her differently abled sibling adds depth to her character, showcasing the challenges and triumphs of their family life. She's a smart and savvy girl harbouring a secret that gradually unravels as the narrative unfolds. Through flashbacks, we delve into the complexities of the friends' final months at school, rife with lies, deceit, competition, and the art of keeping secrets from one another.

One of the standout aspects of this book is the way it introduces class differences and privilege to young readers in a relatable manner. Muñoz also deftly explores the topic of immigration and the struggles faced by children of immigrants, providing a compassionate perspective that considers the experiences of both parents and children. The murder mystery element keeps readers on the edge of their seats until the very end. The author masterfully combines suspense and character development, making us root for Izzy while uncovering her flaws and witnessing her growth. We empathize with her as she grapples with the moral dilemma of choosing between what's easy and what's right.

In *Suddenly a Murder* Lauren Muñoz delivers a compelling narrative that not only entertains but also sparks important conversations about privilege, social issues, and moral choices. It's a book that will leave a lasting impact on its readers, making it a truly unique addition to the young adult literary landscape.

**Anne Singer**

## **Thieves' Gambit**

**Kayvion Lewis, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books**

Rosalyn Quest is a member of a legendary family of thieves. The motto she has been trained to live by since childhood is - trust no one. However, at seventeen Ross is lonely, and desperate to try living a normal life, even if only for a few months, with friends and school. She meticulously plans an escape during one of her family's daring raids, but everything changes when her mother is kidnapped, a ransom issued. The only way for Rosalyn to raise the billion-dollar ransom, and secure her mother's release, is to enter the Thieves' Gambit, an invitation only, cut-throat international competition to crown the world's greatest thief. The prize – the winner will have one wish fulfilled; whatever they choose to wish for.

The group of young thieves recruited for this year's event include Ross' arch- nemesis, Noelia, who betrayed her when they were friendly as children. Will the same thing happen this time, in a contest where almost nothing is outside the rules? During the second phase of the game, the eight young thieves taking part have to work in teams, and Ross finds herself increasingly attracted to handsome, charming Devroe, but is wary of being drawn into a trap. She has to decide whether learning to trust and taking a risk is going to bring the outcome she wants. As the contest draws to a close, it becomes clear that all might not be as it seems.

From the age of twelve, author Kayvion Lewis wished for an incredible, globe-trotting adventure, which didn't materialise until she dreamt up the idea for the book. Skilfully combining fast-paced, high-octane action with audacious heists, in glamorous locations and with more than a hint of romance, this a thrilling read. For readers who like their stories, whether in print or on film, adrenaline filled! I'm certainly looking forward to the sequel promised by the ending.

**Jayne Gould**

## **Wise Creatures**

**Deirdre Sullivan, pub. Bonnier Books**

Do you ever wonder what it's like to be haunted? For Daisy, haunting is a normal occurrence as the ghosts of her troubled past and previous trauma follow her everywhere. She has learnt, through experience that hauntings do not begin with houses the way everyone thinks they do. No, they begin with people. Daisy knows what it is like to be haunted.

Daisy can normally shut out the ghosts, otherwise known as wise creatures, who whisper to her from the walls of the house, until they target her sister Nina. When the wise creatures become more present in both the girls' lives, they bring something dark and sinister and with it more memories and pain are revealed. Daisy is the creatures' home; they overtake her thoughts and actions to the point where she is considered dangerous. When she realises that she is a threat to Nina, she must act, she must try to escape the ghosts that used to haunt her mother too. They have long been locked away but now they are back, and she must learn what they want so she can save herself and her sister.

Initially I struggled to read this book as it was not my usual style of story, so I found it hard to get into. However, with perseverance, I found that I greatly enjoyed *Wise Creatures* which is both beautifully written and very dark. It's filled with twists and turns and the plotline made the book hard to put down once I was immersed in the storyline. It is an incredibly worthwhile read that allowed me to experience the pain of the characters and want to help them. One to try.

**Gemma Walford**

# Non-Fiction Books

## **Ben Rothery's Weird and Wonderful Animals**

**Ben Rothery, pub. Penguin Random House Children's Books**

Ben Rothery is known for his stunningly detailed illustrations of wildlife, his large-format book *Hidden Planet* won the 2021 Silver Pencil Award. *Weird and Wonderful Animals* is no exception. It is a curated collection of some of the more incredible creatures found in the animal kingdom from firm favourites, such as sloths and octopuses, through to the more unusual, such as the binturong and paradise flying snake.

The book is presented in three sections: Air; Earth and Water with an illustrated contents page making for easy navigation. The illustrations span full pages, and many are accompanied by smaller drawings showing the detail of the different animals' feathers, claws, eyes, and suchlike. My favourite is the elephant, a wonderful close-up drawing showing marvellously wrinkled skin and long eyelashes. The majority of the pages have been given muted backgrounds, a perfect foil for the clear text that is presented in short segments. An additional plus is that the book's pages have been printed with a matt finish making them accessible to dyslexic readers as well as those with visual impairment.

For each entry there is basic information about the animal in focus, listing its geographical location, weight, and size. That and the addition of lots of interesting facts will be certain to engage children. A good book is one where you always discover something new and reading *Ben Rothery's Weird and Wonderful Animals* I learnt that tardigrades, which are miniscule albeit fearsome looking aquatic animals, are virtually indestructible! A perfect book for ages 6 - 8 years although older children would also enjoy reading it.

## **Barbara Band**

### **Books and the People Who Make Them**

**Stéphanie Vernet, trans. Paul Kelly, illus. Camille de Cussac, pub. Prestel**

This one is difficult to assess. Stylistically, it's unlike the books we're used to; subject-wise, it's very niche. I suspect most readers will pass by ungrabbed while some will absolutely love it, and why not? All books should be as confident and sincere as this one, and not worry about being vaguely interesting to as many people as possible.

It's a picture book which presents all the steps, both creative and commercial, taken in the process of creating a book, from the mind of the author to the reader turning its pages. It's thorough and

insightful, and is appealingly technical, which will I think narrow its potential audience, but will give them a deeper, more satisfying read. Certainly, I would have been happy using this as a primer back when I was training new editors. It uses itself as part of the process, which is charming, but I hope that won't cause problems with booksellers. It has, for example, an exposed spine that, because the book's design is so under-stated, might lead some to conclude they've received broken goods.

The design generally is muted and chic, elegant even, but I feel too unassuming for the visual vernacular of a UK audience. The typography is a little dwarfed by the graphics. It doesn't scream in the way knowledge books often seem to think they need to. The language has that kind of awkwardness too. I think the translation from the French is probably spot on in capturing the author's voice and it freights a conspiratorial and formal intimacy that feels exotic in a learning-book environment. When I hear the words I'm reading in my head, they're full of inflection and character.

Is this review helping? I think I could triple my word-count and keep going, it's that sort of book. Hard to categorise. I think it's a gem that does an unexpected job admirably well, but in a manner that sets it apart from the books we're used to, thereby making it hard to suggest exactly who it will please. There's a sophistication in the text that will defeat the younger reader; a chilled-out simplicity to the illustration that will fall short of the packed, exaggerated, and frantic young adult visual style.

I feel the sweet spot will be the book-loving Years 6 to 8 who may be coming into a sense of where they want their lives to go and discovering their passion could also be their living. Those apart, it's a good start for the book-production-curious of all ages, and an accessible introductory reference for an under-represented industry.

**Dmytro Bojaniwskyj**

## **Dear Rebel: 125+ Women Share Their Secrets to Taking on the World** **Revel Girls Inc, pub. DK**

Many readers may be familiar with the *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls* series. A series of books filled with tales of extraordinary women. This latest volume from Rebel Girls and DK, *Dear Rebel*, is a great addition to the collection. Published to celebrate International Day of the Girl, it contains the stories of over one hundred and twenty-five teens and women spanning in age from 13 to 68 years. They originate from thirty-seven countries across the globe and represent an impressive eighty-two professions. These are not your typical inspirational stories from familiar historical figures. Instead, they shine a spotlight on contemporary women who share their passions and recount their journeys of how they overcame obstacles and adversity to achieve their dreams. Although some of the names were known to me, for example Drew Barrymore and Melinda Gates, most were not.

The contributors to this volume encompass a diverse and inclusive spectrum of backgrounds, each sharing advice; words of wisdom; encouragement; and personal anecdotes through first-person short texts; letters; poems; and essays. The book is a visual delight, adorned with an abundance of photographs, its pages are filled with vibrant colours and captivating illustrations that make it both appealing and exciting. As part of the Dear Rebel campaign, the book incorporates QR codes throughout its pages allowing readers to access companion audio content via podcasts and interviews.

Although aimed at readers in the 8 – 12 years age bracket, its content would resonate with older readers. *Dear Rebel* is a treasure trove for anyone seeking inspiration and motivation, making it an invaluable addition to school libraries and a perfect gift for those looking to empower and uplift others.

**Barbara Band**

## **Drawn to Change the World**

**Emma Reynolds et al, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books**

This beautiful graphic novel collection includes the stories and campaigns of sixteen young climate activists, each one illustrated by a different artist.

Celebrating the work of these young champions, each of whom are achieving incredible things, this book encourages those who are reading to do something, to take action; and reminds you that no matter your age, you CAN make a difference. The editor, Emma Reynolds, founded the KidLit4Climate campaign and has brought these stories together to give young climate campaigners a voice. Published at a time when government policies are ever changing, vulnerable communities are being exploited, and the earth is changing faster than ever before it is important to use our voices and to join together to demand changes. The stories are uplifting and each one shines a light on the different campaigns taking place around our world. As well as the graphic stories there are also interviews with the activists and written articles containing lots of background information.

Reading this book, we learn more about the fight to protect the planet, reading the stories such as those of Melati and Isabel Wijsen in Indonesia who in 2013 were inspired by a talk on sustainability at their school and set up a campaign to create a plastic free Bali. They were successful and in 2019 single use plastics were banned. The girls won an award and Bye Bye Plastic Bags is now an international movement. This is a book that we should all be talking about.

**Anna Elson**

## **Great Minds**

**John Haig and Joan Lennon, illus. André Ducci, pub. Templar Books**

*Great Minds*, sub-titled 2500 years of thinkers and philosophy, introduces twenty such individuals from around the world, the ancient, the medieval and the modern as well as from the Eastern and the Western traditions, disturbing this simple dichotomy by including African and Māori philosophy.

It is an interesting and original selection of thinkers and philosophers. Whilst most chapters focus on one person, the authors cleverly open up space to introduce new philosophers by grouping Socrates, Plato and Aristotle together in a chapter about 'The Socratics' and Descartes, Bentham and Wollstonecraft in the chapter on the 'The Age of Reason'. For the first time I am reading about the Kenyan philosopher, Henry Odera Oruka and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, an American philosopher, forming part of a group developing critical race theory in the twentieth century. It also creates space to be more inclusive, notably with more female philosophers. Philippa Foot is a personal hero, but again, for the first time I am reading about Susanne Langer, one of the first American women philosophers, exploring the importance of art and aesthetics.

Each chapter is between two or three double spreads in length, beginning with a title page, richly illustrated by André Ducci. The graphic novel format allows the authors to cram in a lot of information! They set the historical context and include a short biography of each thinker, before discussing the philosophical questions and concepts that preoccupied them as well as their legacy of thought through time and into the modern age. The illustration and colour scheme continues to unify each chapter, perfectly balancing out the text and creating a visually appealing reading experience. Industry, for example, dominates the illustration about Karl Marx as we follow his ideas and legacy along a production line. The timeline, drawn as a denotating cord, of revolution, war and Darwinism however is particularly powerful.

The content is most suitable for Key Stage Three. It will also serve me well in my classroom, brilliantly summarising individual's lives and important events as well as posing philosophical conundrums in an accessible way that I can post on my classroom door to puzzle pupils passing-by.

*Great Minds* is simply a breath of fresh air, opening new windows on the subject of philosophy.

**Simon Barrett**

**Mission: Arctic A Scientific Adventure to a Changing North Pole**  
**Katharina Weiss-Tuider, illus. Christian Schneider, pub. Greystone Kids**

This is a serious book on an important topic. The Arctic is an area of concern because it is melting, and this is having an impact all around the world - "what happens in the Arctic never stays in the Arctic." But despite its importance, we know very little about the area. *Mission: Arctic* takes us on the



largest expedition to the Arctic ever undertaken. We join over five hundred scientists from all over the world who study how the Arctic is changing and how this will impact on our world. The Polarstern is a powerful ice-breaker research vessel which freezes in the sea ice and drifts towards the North Pole. Throughout their time in this inhospitable dangerous world of ice, extreme cold and darkness scientists collect data and explore the eco-systems.

The book is an attractive large format hardback and is well designed. There are photographs, notes, illustrations, diagrams, facts and pages from journals and logbooks. The balance between text and illustration is excellent. I particularly enjoyed the pages on Nasen's Daring Trip Towards the North Pole where each of his dogs is illustrated and listed, and the comparison between Nansen's Fur Coats and "Today's High Tech" clothing. The comprehensive contents page demonstrates the wide range of topics covered – Part One -The Biggest Arctic Expedition of All Time, Part Two - Climate Research on the Ice with Team Ice, Team Atmosphere, Team Ocean, Team Ecosystem and Team Biochemistry, and Part 3 – Our Arctic, Our Future. The book is packed with information presented in an accessible manner. Did you know that, under their white fur, a polar bear's skin is almost black? Strictly speaking its hair is not white but transparent.

The book concludes with a powerful environmental message: "Wouldn't the biggest danger be if we all counted on someone else to save the Arctic?" We are given advice on how we can rescue the climate every day. "The future of the Arctic depends on whether humanity lowers its greenhouse gas emission."

Anyone aged 8+ will learn from this excellent informative and inspirational book. Bravo!

**Brenda Marshall**

## **My Emotions and Me**

**Armella Leung, pub. Summersdale Publishers**

Emotions are complex, we all have them, but we don't all understand them, what they do to us, how they appear and importantly what to do when we see them in others too. Maybe you are curious about why we have emotions, how we can process them, if this comes naturally or has to be learnt. Perhaps you would like to know more about the way in which emotions can create moods and feelings and moreover how our brains work to sort all this out for us, almost without us realising. If you have any questions about emotions Art-mella's graphic novel, non-fiction title is the perfect book to pick up and read. It will take you on a journey of discovery and make you smile quite a lot – is that an emotion poking through?

Art-mella is not alone in her journey of exploration, her sidekick Rattie is there with her every step of the way proving that we never need to deal with our emotions alone or feel alone. There is always

someone we can share with even when we might feel incredibly conflicted. Now, rather than using chapters or sections, I should tell you that this book uses headings, you will find them in the top lefthand corner of a page, when the topic is changing. Even better is that this book comes from personal experience, Art-mella tells us that she wrote it after deciding she needed to investigate her ever-fluctuating emotions. She takes it a step at a time. Asking if there is a need driving the emotion, coaching readers in techniques that will help cancel out thoughts that cause suffering she makes it feel managing our emotions achievable.

I loved this book. I enjoyed learning more about my own body and the way my brain works, why I sometimes feel emotions I wasn't expecting and how I can manage them. Drawing, doodling in the printed stars so I could put my thoughts on paper, learning to use my senses and describe them, finding mindfulness techniques and even some yoga poses, this book has it all and I am quite certain children are going to love the interactions between Art-mella and Rattie too!

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **My First Space Atlas**

**Jane Wilsher, illus. Paul Daviz, pub. Weldon Owen**

A most attractive book that takes the reader into space to “explore the SOLAR SYSTEM and BEYOND.” On our journey we look at the night sky, blast off into space, join the International Space Station, go on a space walk and a trip to the moon, visit our very own star, meet other planets, think about Mars, consider space junk, go to the Milky Way, think about the universe, and look up at space. The content is wide ranging and appealing. Each page repays close scrutiny. Information is detailed, clear and pitched at right level in appropriate language. Indeed, the facts have been checked by Space Consultant Professor Ben Maughan of the University of Bristol. I particularly enjoyed the section on Living in the International Space Station, and the pages on a Spacewalk and Space Junk.

The visual impact of the book is powerful, and the design is clever and varied with a good balance of information and illustration. Some pages are portrait and some landscape. Colourful pictures, captions, diagrams are used to enhance the text. My favourite is the Mars rover where a clear diagram with captions is set against orange and yellow background. Strap line question to answer encourage the reader to engage with text with questions like, “What does an astronaut do on the ISS?” and “What happens after lift off?” Each double page spread has an inter-active Spot It! Circle that asks a couple of questions that encourage reader reflect on and perhaps revisit the page, such as “Can you find the footprints in the dust?” and “How many wheels does the lunar rover have?”

This is a high-quality information book with a detailed contents page, an index and a useful glossary of space words. Highly recommended. Age 4+.

**Brenda Marshall**

## **Roots of Happiness**

**Susie Dent, illus. Harriet Hobday, pub. Puffin**

This is an odd book to review, because it's broad in its potential readership yet niche in its subject matter; unlikely to be bought by younger readers for themselves, but possibly a popular pick from the library shelf.

This is a well-being book. It uses unfamiliar and forgotten words as a means to naming and expressing positive feelings, thereby enabling progress to a happier mental and emotional space. It's like the old maxim: what gets measured gets valued. Here it's: what gets named gets felt. Does it work on me? I think so.

It's refreshing to take a break to roll many of the 100 words contained herein around my mouth, like cake mix in a bowl or water in a stream. They verbalise beautifully. It's interesting to read the erudite and welcoming accompanying texts on each word's roots and purposes. The illustrations in which each word is nested are generally generically accomplished, but sometimes leap into inspired and gorgeous. Some of them I could look at every day; some I'd live in. The pronunciation guide is a thoughtful touch. What would it be useful for you to know? I'd buy this book and keep it. I would dip into it from time to time, perhaps when I needed cheering up. I would learn interesting things about words I know but don't use, and words I've never heard of. It wouldn't be my favourite book, but I wouldn't be parted from it.

For competent readers who struggle to give voice to their feelings. For word-loving readers who want to stretch their knowledge a little further. For the habitually curious.

**Dmytro Bojaniwskyj**

## **Size Wise: A Fact-Filled Look at Life-Size Wonders**

**Camilla de la Bedoyere, Vasilisa Romanenko, pub. Buster Books**

A stunning book that introduces us to some of the biggest and smallest wonders of nature. The close-up of a giraffe's head on the cover attracts attention. The contents page is equally appealing with a bewitching half owl, a bat upside-down and a wide-ranging list of over 30 topics. Throughout the book almost all the illustrations are life-size so the reader "will get a real sense of the amazing size and scale of the natural world." Symbols indicate where the focus has zoomed in or out. Pages are well designed with a good balance of text and illustrations.

I was mesmerised by the squid's eye which is about 27cm across! The figures are made accessible by saying it is the size of a football pitch and comparing with the size of human eye which is 2.2cm. The impact of the stunning illustrations is supported by interesting text, such as "Why So Huge?" which explains why the squid needs such large eyes. The rainforest Rafflesia bloom is stunning. It can weigh up to 7kg and grow to widths of up to 1m.

I loved the picture of a gorilla's hand with flat nails.

Small animals are also featured such as the Dwarf Blue Butterfly which weighs 10 milligrams and has a wingspan of just 10mm and the Pygmy Jerboa with huge legs compared to its body length. The Mini Mariners found in the oceans are fascinating as are the Eggstremely Small eggs. I also enjoyed the world of Rainbow Diatoms, magnified grains of sand, and Sparkling Crystals of snowflakes, salt, and sugar. The Glossary is excellent, and the tables of units of measurement and Imperial Measurements are useful.

The book is a brilliant way to learn about and appreciate the natural world. There is plenty to capture the imagination, inspire awe and wonder and lead on to further research. Highly recommended.

**Brenda Marshall**

## **The Story of Pasta and How to Cook It!**

**Steven Guarnaccia, recipes Heather Thomas, pub. Phaidon**

Have you ever wondered what pasta is, where it comes from and if there are any new recipes for cooking it to try? I know I have, after all there is something so very appealing about it and it is incredibly versatile. Author Steven Guarnaccia is fascinated by pasta, and it is one of his favourite foods. In fact, he tells us that if he had to eat only one food, every day, for the rest of his life, it would be pasta. Why? "Because there are so many great shapes that if I got bored with one, I could just choose another, and not have to repeat any for at least a year!"

There are 365 days in a year which goes some way to revealing how many pasta shapes there are and 35 of them are shared in this book. We get a history for each of them followed by recipes contributed by Heather Thomas. All the recipes are suitable for children to cook (with adult supervision). There is a brilliant set of illustrations at the start of the book showing us what no Italian kitchen would be without (and of course this means they are all helpful for the recipes in this book and for cooking pasta)! The recipes are given with tips, many have alternative options and every single one is mouth-wateringly illustrated.

You can truly improve your cooking skills with this book but also learn some 'wow' factor facts. For example, did you know that pasta carbonara is the most commonly cooked pasta dish on the planet?

Here are some more facts: around the globe approximately 14 billion plates of pasta are consumed every year; Fusilli pasta was originally made, in Southern Italy by rolling a strand of spaghetti around a knitting needle! While many pastas have been around for decades cavatappi or corkscrew pasta was only created in the 1970s; mezze maniche was once used as shirt sleeves so people could have a nibble if they got hungry.

No doubt reading this is making you hungry and rightly so. The recipes are delicious, look tasty, are straightforward enough for children to have a go at and for everyone to enjoy. So, the next time you, any children you may know or in fact anyone you may know, wants to have some pasta think of *The Story of Pasta and How to Cook It!* find yourself a copy, create a wonderful meal and share some amazing facts. History, cooking and design, this book has it all and more – enjoy!

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **Superpowered Animals**

**Soledad Romero Mariño, illus. Sonia Pulido, pub. Phaidon**

*Superpowered Animals* profiles 22 of the world's strongest, smartest, and swiftest creatures, possessing 19 amazing superpowers and extraordinary survival skills. They are the animal kingdom world record holders of incredible abilities.

Listing the biological classification of each animal and their superpowers, rated and ranked out of five, Soledad Romero Mariño describes each of the superpower in more detail and explains how it helps these animals to survive. Meticulously researched, these superpowers include astonishing senses, such as the Grass Snakes' super smell detecting chemical substances in the air using its tongue, unbelievable physical abilities – the Crocodile has super regeneration, re-growing up to 3,000 teeth in its lifetime – and remarkable communication and collaboration, indicative of intelligence, for example, Exploding Ants, possessing super teamwork, living and literally dying to keep its colony safe.

Further scientific information on each animal describes the size, colour, special features, lifespan, habitat, diet, reproduction and predators. Additional information explains how these animals contribute to the health of the planet and their unique special ability or skill, such as cats jump the human equivalent of 3 storeys. The Polar Bear certainly earns its moniker 'The Arctic powerhouse' with the greatest number of superpowers, seven.

On the opposite page of the spread is a tarot card inspired illustration by Sonia Pulido, an international award-winning Barcelona-based artist and author of *What a Shell Can Tell*. The illustrations clearly show the animal's superpowers and a full colour portrait of the animal, adding

extra details, such as the animal's habitat. The iconic picture of the Common Octopus, chosen to be also the front cover.

The graphics for each superpower are self-explanatory, but occasionally seem strange when attributed to a particular animal. The symbol of super legs is a paw such as a wolf's paw, attributed to a Iberian Ibex that has hooves and the talons of a True Owl. Super bite is an apple with two bites taken out of it and Great White Sharks, whose bit is 300 times stronger than a human's, eat fish and sea mammals. I suspect the publishing team spent a lot of time wrestling with which symbols to use!

*Superpowered Animals* is a factual feast about record breaking beasts in Animalia.

**Simon Barrett**

## **Picture books**

### **Begin Again**

Oliver Jeffers

### **Beneath**

Cori Doerrfeld

### **Butterfly Girl**

Ashling Kwok, illus. Arielle Li

### **Count the Stars**

Raewyn Caisley, illus. Gabriel Evans

### **Gina Kaminski Saves the Wolf**

Craig Barr-Green, illus. Francis Martin

### **Imperfectly Perfect**

Perry Emerson, illus. Hoang Giang

### **The Magic of Me!**

Ben Cort

### **Meet Mim**

Sandra Severgnini

### **The Most Famous Rhinoceros**

Dianne Hofmeyr, illus. Simona Mulazzani

### **Peace On Earth**

Smriti Halls, illus. David Litchfield

### **We Went to Find a Woolly Mammoth**

Catherine Cawthorne, illus. Aysha Awwad

### **Wolf and Bear**

Kate Rolfe

## **Junior books**

### **Butterfly Wings**

Samuel Laroche, illus. Eve Patenaude, trans.  
Arielle Aaronson

### **Cloudlanders**

Christopher Mackie

### **Dreamweavers: Night of the Scary Fairies**

Anabelle Sami, illus. Forrest Burdett

### **The Final Year**

Matt Goodfellow, illus. Joe Todd-Stanton

### **Finding Wonder**

Lauren St John, illus. Levi Pinfold & Marie-  
Alice Harel

### **I Am the Wind. Irish Poems for Children Everywhere**

Lucinda Jacob and Sarah Webb, illus. Ashwin  
Chacko

### **In the Shadow of the Wolf Queen**

Kiran Millwood Hargrave

### **Kevin the Vampire: A Most Mysterious Monster**

Matt Brown, illus. Flavia Sorrentino

### **The Shade Tree**

Suzy Lee, trans. Helen Mixter

### **The Silver Road**

Sinéad O'Hart

### **The Stars Did Wander Darkling**

Colin Meloy

### **The Vanquishers**

Kalynn Bayron



## **Young Adult books**

### **Are We There Yet?**

David Levithan

### **Babushka**

Natasha Devon

### **Champion of Fate**

Kendare Blake

### **Every Exquisite Thing**

Laura Stevens

### **I Feed Her to the Beast and the Beast is Me**

Jamison Shea

### **The Love Report**

Beka (Caroline Roque and Bertrand Escaich),  
illus. Maya (Martina Mura)

### **Play**

Luke Palmer

### **Sisters of Sword and Shadow**

Laura Bates

### **Suddenly a Murder**

Lauren Muñoz

### **Thieves' Gambit**

Kayvion Lewis

### **Wise Creatures**

Deirdre Sullivan

## **Non-Fiction books**

### **Ben Rothery's Weird and Wonderful Animals**

Ben Rothery

### **Superpowered Animals**

Soledad Romero Mariño, illus. Sonia Pulido

### **Books and the People Who Make Them**

Stéphanie Vernet, trans. Paul Kelly, illus.

Camille de Cussac

### **Dear Rebel: 125+ Women Share Their Secrets to Taking on the World**

Revel Girls Inc

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Emma Reynolds et al

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