



Armadillo
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**Summer
2025**

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Board Books

A Little Book of Kind

Jess McGreachin, pub. Allen & Unwin

It shouldn't be difficult to be kind but at the same time it isn't difficult to have a charming reminder about how important it is. This board book also introduces us to all manner of wild creatures, reminding us too that the names used are Western, that they may have other names in the languages of those who share the land with them.

All those who flutter, they started with a crawl. Those with a hard shell are soft inside. Fins help another group create a symphony of colour, waddlers love to huddle, and above all be kind to our tiny spinning dot, it's the only home we've all got. Outstanding in its simplicity, this little book is a treasure.

The Bedtime Book

Todd Parr, pub. Little Brown Kids

It's bedtime but no-one is ready to sleep. I wonder if that sounds familiar to you and what you do to change their minds. After all, when faced with the hiccups, a hungry tummy or a request for one more hug, one more kiss, what can you do but give in. That of course means bedtime is delayed, again.

Help could be at hand. See puppy? He is brushing his teeth and narwhal is being good, taking her bubble bath. The kittens are tucked in and waiting for their story. Now that does sound like a really good idea, if only all the others would listen. They might then discover that sleeping and bedtimes are very important...

Look Out! Hungry Shark

Look Out! Hungry Spider

Paul Delaney, pub. Kumusha Books

When its dinnertime Shark can find himself very hungry. Slippery, soaring, something walking sideways but will these fill shark up or will it be the very big something that he has spotted? As you share the rhyming text remember to lift the flaps to continue the story and check all the additional details in the illustrations. There is plenty of fun waiting in this one!

When Spider senses it is dinnertime things that live in the air sound tasty, in fact all those sounds suggest tasty morsels for his tummy. If they aren't enough the pumpkins look very crunchy and when it's a dinnertime adventure he wants, well those big plants look very appetising... Who do you think might be hiding under the flaps in this one?

Match & Sort Colours

Match & Sort Shapes

pub. Priddy Books

Toddlers can learn the basics of some important skills at home or nursery before they start school and with these practical and fun board books they will want to learn as well as keep coming back for more. Matching and sorting means finding similarities, that can be done by eye but also touch, this pair encourage both.

Find touch and feel cutouts on every other page plus a pouch of reusable pieces. Interaction with the story can be taken to new levels with this pair of books. *Colour* encourages not only matching but also spotting with prompts for young readers to follow. *Shapes* works on a similar principal and both books encourage young children to learn more than they realise in a fun and relaxing way.

Mini Pops! Growly Tiger

Mini Pops! Happy Baby

Isa Piraccus, pub. Templar

Learn how much fun can be had when there are a handful of words on the page, rhyming and accompanied by a pop-up ~ every time! Maybe you will find a favourite page with the animal you love the best, maybe it will be the one that makes you laugh the most or will it be the noises and actions that your little reader will love best of all?

Babies can be a mystery to their older siblings, with this board book many of their different actions are shared. You might hear them cry, giggle, be happy and clappy perhaps they are grumpy and hungry or, better yet, snoring! Discover the different faces they make for each different moment and join in with the fun.

My Best Friend Is An Otter

My Best Friend Is A Turtle

pub. Priddy Books

Do you have a best friend or pet? Perhaps there is an animal you love.

I wonder if your best friend was an otter whether she would wear shimmery glasses and add sprinkles to every meal! Whatever that best friend, otter or any other animal I hope that, just like this one, the best thing about her is that she is always there for you.

It is of course possible that your best friend could be a turtle, a shiny green one who loves to wear the coolest shorts and play his favourite sport, football, every Saturday. He might eat a tonne of cereal but I bet he is fun, super-smart and has a special place in your heart.

Rose Signs Good Morning!

Rose Ayling-Ellis, illus. Margarida Sampaio, pub. DK

When Rose wakes up each day she always makes sure there is time for a morning snuggle with Casper and they both love toast with strawberry jam for breakfast. Time for a drink but who has Rose found in the sink! Getting dressed: make sure to find Caspar an outfit too!

It is never too soon to learn valuable skills. With this charming, bright board book children can learn many skills, to read, to look for clues, learn new words and learn some basic signs. These signs are part of a language known as British Sign Language and they allow people who have hearing problems to communicate. Why not sign with Rose and Caspar?

The Secret Powers of Animals

Soledad Romero Mariño, illus Sonia Pulido, pub. Phaidon

Animals can do so much more than we might give them credit for and with this delightful board book you can discover what some of those things are. But remember these are secret powers. You can only find them if you look under the flap, make sure to keep what you find a secret, maybe to be shared to impress someone?

Learn more about the characters: elephant, octopus, owl, narwhal, bees, polar bear, dung beetle, cheetah, lizard, and cat. The rhyming text that accompanies each double page spread is on one side, a picture with some flaps to find and lift, on the other. Can you make a guess before you lift, were you right or do you need to try again? A true gem.

Shaped Bath Book: Duck & Friends

Shaped Bath Book: Octopus & Friends

illus. Surya Sajnani, pub. Happy Yak

Last year we discovered the *Wee Gallery Shaped Bath Books*. We've had lots of fun with them, especially after realising the pages change colour when they are in the bath creating magical pictures. Now we can add to the collection of bath time fun books with another two.

I wonder who we'll meet when we share the bath with *Duck & Friends* or with *Octopus & Friends*, can we put them all in there at the same time, will they get along? Once you put them in the water do you think you'll be able to guess who is changing colour and will you have a favourite or will they all be there in that bedtime bath with you? Simply brilliant.

Wow! Look At Me!

Wow! What A Party!

Alberta Torres, pub. Kumusha Books

Being proud of an achievement, no matter how big or small is an important milestone for children. There will be plenty. It's important to remember to recognise them, encourage pride in them. It could be counting all the way to 10 and back, riding a tricycle or even doing a roly-poly. These are all Wow! moments to celebrate.

When a big event, maybe a birthday party, is about to happen there are the inevitable questions. What time will it start, what am I allowed to wear, will there be games, noise, food? With so many things to think about it could be stressful or simply lots of fun. Let's hope yours will be as fun as the one in this delight of a board book.

Picturebooks

A Home Is A Nest

Emma Carlisle, pub. Big Picture Press

Emma Carlisle's *A Home is a Nest* is a beautiful celebration of spring and new life – both human and animal, specifically birds. The life of a bird couple and their new baby chick is mirrored with the life inside a nearby nest beginning with when the parents carry the baby to their house for the first time just as a blackbird's eggs are cracking. Surrounded by other animals and their young the sentiments written on the page are felt by the human family, the various animal families including deer, hedgehogs, rabbits, and all sorts of birds, and those reading the story itself.

The text reads as a lullaby calming a young child reinforcing the love, safety, and comfort of their home and family. There is also a mindfulness to the book which can be used to encourage children to pay attention to the world outside their houses, teaching them about different types of British garden birds and also about animal's homes.

As the year progresses and the seasons change the child gets older and different animals appear – robins in winter, butterflies in summer. The text celebrates the child's journey, what they have achieved in their first year and what is still to come whilst reinforcing the fact that their home and family, and the nature surrounding them will always be there.

Carlisle's illustrations are beautiful, there is so much depth and detail to the richly coloured realistic scenes, and the text is a gentle, simple, non-rhyming lyrical verse. Full of warmth, life, and sentiment this would make a lovely gift for a new child.

Natalie McChrystal Plimmer

Danny McGee Drinks the Sea

Andy Stanton, illus. Neal Layton, pub. Faber

As you might expect from the author of the *Mr Gum* stories and other zany books, this picture book is very silly.

Danny, he of the title, makes a bet with his sister, Frannie, and she fetches 'a straw that was longer than she.' This means the events that happen can indeed happen! He not only drinks up the sea but consumes lots of other things: a cat who was drinking some tea; a man who was learning to ski; the weather girl on the TV - all gleefully and colourfully illustrated by Neal Layton. Then there's a real

picture of Andy Stanton: 'he swallowed the people and that includes me, and I'm writing this book inside Danny McGee'- such fun!

And no, Danny doesn't burst unlike Tiddalik the greedy frog or Monty Python's Mr Creosote, nothing bad happens. Danny goes on to swallow America, land of the free, and London, chim chim cheree! Then he boasts that he has swallowed everything in the world, but Frannie points out that 'you didn't get me' - and (spoiler alert!) she swallows him! That is a great twist, and children should be highly amused. The rhyme and rhythm all through this book are good for building vocabulary and make it good to read aloud and share.

Both Andy Stanton and Neal Layton are well experienced in what works well with children, and this is great fun.

Diana Barnes

Letters To A Monster

Patricia Forde, illus. Sarah Warburton, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Sophie has finally had enough of the monster who hides under her bed. She decides to write him a letter making it very clear that he is not welcome there! To her surprise, the monster responds with a letter of his own, very much denying that he does indeed live under Sophie's bed. A marvellous starting point for a brilliant story which is most definitely for bedtimes and even more definitely filled with laughter.

What follows is a series of letters between the two which carry the story and it is lovely to see their relationship grow from a cagey one to a strong friendship. There is a wonderful turning point in the book where Sophie is told that there is actually a gorilla under her bed and the monster helps her to write a letter to him. With a shared interest and purpose, the two team up to try and persuade the gorilla to move out from under Sophie's bed.

This is a terrific tale which is creatively written – a lovely story to share with a young one before bedtime!

Tom Joy

Lulu is a Rhinoceros

Jason Flom, Allison Flom, illus. Sophie Corrigan, pub. Greystone Kids

Lulu is a small dog with a big personality and a lot of confidence. In spite of what she sees in the mirror and how others see her, she knows inside that she is not a dog at all, but a rhinoceros. No matter that she has fuzzy fur, a nub of a tail and a small button nose, in her mind she knows who she is.

The only thing that she doesn't have and really wants, is a horn. Maybe that would show everyone who the real Lulu is. She tries unsuccessfully to fashion a horn from an ice-cream cone (too cold), a traffic cone (too big) and an old sock (too smelly). Could a banana skin be the answer?

Despite a bullying pigeon who insists that Lulu is just a bulldog with a banana skin on her nose, Lulu eventually finds herself inside the rhinoceros enclosure at the zoo. Here she finds kindness in the form of a tickbird and the two become inseparable. Lulu finally finds validation and a friend.

Lulu has an important message for her readers about self-expression, individuality and acceptance, which is gently told through this sweet story and adorable, vibrant illustrations. Sometimes being yourself is a difficult road to travel, but when judgment is replaced with curiosity and kindness, the world becomes a better place. This wonderful picture book embraces what makes us all unique and I look forward to reading about more of Lulu's exploits in further books in this series.

Janet Ling

No One Is Home

Mikolaj Pa, illus. Gosia Herba, trans. Scotia Gilroy, pub. Greystone Kids

Leo remembers that it is his friend Kimbo's birthday and decides to surprise him with a visit and a fun day out together. But on the way all kinds of events get in the way, starting with a host of frogs playing hide and seek in the hallway, and when he finally gets to his destination, he finds that Kimbo is not at home! He phones his friend, only to discover that he is at Leo's house, having had the same idea. Luckily, they are able to agree when and where to meet up and they have a great time together.

This is a delightfully amusing story of what can go wrong when you try and spring a surprise on someone. However, it is also something that has happened to many of us in the past, especially before the advent of the mobile phone.

What provides an added dimension to this story is the game of seek the frogs' which is going on throughout the book. If you have readers who enjoy books such as *Where's Wally* they will also love this; especially as there are variable numbers of frogs on each page and they are doing a range of activities. The extremely bright and quirky illustrations really add a sense of fun to the book as well as increasing the pace of the story.

I highly recommended this book as the perfect read for children of nursery age and beyond.

Margaret Pemberton

Once I Was A Tree

A Book (with help from Eoin McLaughlin), illus. Guilherme Karsten, pub. Nosy Crow

Did you know that paper is made from trees? Books are of course made from paper which means there are a lot of books in homes, libraries, schools, bookshops, so very many places, that all used to be a tree! Well maybe they were all different trees but I am sure you get my meaning.

Now, I ought to confess that I am one of those people who is more than certain that trees have stories to tell us. How can they not, they stand tall and strong, watching the world around them. *Once I Was A Tree* simply supports my feelings on this. This is a book, a story, about a tree, told by the book which used to be the tree which I am quite certain means trees have stories to tell. There is more. It is not just this review, or this reviewer which may seem madcap and a little zany, the book is too... I mean, have you ever read an autobiographical account by a book? Nope, my first time too!

First things first, we meet the tall and handsome pine tree that Book once was. To continue you'll have to turn the book around, well he did say he was tall... Next you will need to make sure your brain can cope with long time periods and a little bit of evolution for a squirrel, an acorn and its bottom come next. His name was Derek, make sure to say hello for he is important in this story, as is Barbara the beetle. Book, who was once a tree, had a wonderful life but when they came and chopped him down he was fuming. Now. Well now he feels better for now that he is a book he knows that books are magic for they are full of stories which go on forever.

Make sure to treasure this, and every book, remember it is waiting for you!

Louise Ellis-Barrett

The One and Only You

Shane Hegarty, illus. Ben Mantle, pub. Hachette Children's Books

This delightful story is a confidence boosting and historical romp through time. It is a true celebration of the uniqueness that makes each person special. While we may be compared to others or look similar, our unique look, personality, views and opinions meld together to make us individual.

So much has changed through time from the creation of the world, through to dinosaurs and then humans- space and galaxies, oceans and earth splitting! However, there has never been anyone

exactly the same as anyone else. Ben Mantle's exuberant illustrations really take the reader on a journey through time and allow them a brilliant opportunity to embrace themselves and be proud of who they are. There are whales singing songs that carry across the oceans, mice scurrying around doing what mice do, insects who buzz about being bust, dinosaurs big and small, hot air balloons with character, wherever the reader looks there is something exciting happening, all described with a sparkling sense of humour and Shane Hegarty's fantastic use of imagery with his words.

What an amazing story to gift or read aloud to a group of children. They can then shout about how special they truly are.

Erin Hamilton

Our Tree

Jessica Meserve, pub. Little Tiger

On a warm day, Tree feels the patter of little feet as Little Red scampers up their trunk and proclaims, "This tree is all for me." However, Little Red soon realises he is not alone when behind him he sees a tiny caterpillar chomping on a leaf. Soon they are joined by a swift who thanks Tree for such splendid branches for resting on. "Resting is boring" says Little Red, shortly before Tree is filled with swift's friends all trilling and piping in unison.

Later, animals of all shapes and sizes visit the tree, much to the annoyance of Little Red who doesn't want to share and sets off to find a new tree that he can keep for himself. But a trip and a slip and Little Red almost comes to a sticky end when he lands on a leopard who roars hungrily that "the tree is just for me and so are all the animals in it!" However, the leopard is no match for the animals all working together and Little Red finally realises the value of friends and the power of teamwork.

The very detailed illustrations provide lots to look at while the reader absorbs the message of the story about the importance of sharing and the power of community. A joyous celebration of tolerance and togetherness.

Janet Ling

Early Reader Books

Amelia Cheeseheart Investigates: Mummy Mayhem

Cat Weldon, illus. Nene Lonergan, pub. Mini Guppy

A brand new series from a brand new imprint. Mini Guppy aims to bring small tactile books with short chapter, lots of illustration, which encourage laughter and a love of reading. In this book they have succeeded in those aims. Meet Amelia and her best friend Webster. Amelia is a mouse, Webster a spider and they live in Amelia's nest, in a hot air balloon which you will find in a museum gift shop!

Amelia loves adventure and solving mysteries which is fortunate for one is about to unfold. All the other museum mice are in uproar, a mummified figure is roaming the halls after closing. It must have come from the Egyptian room but what could it possibly want and are they going to be brave enough to find out? A brilliant adventure, a touch of mystery, a splash of history, this book is certain to engage young children starting out on their own adventure – one of reading independence.

Gordon Wins It All

Alex Latimer, pub. Oxford Children's Books

Have you met Gordon? He is known as the meanest goose on earth for very good reason, he really is mean! The stories he features in (this is his third) will almost certainly have you laughing, wanting to come back for more. When we first met him he was meaner than mean until a certain piglet showed him kindness. Now he is getting to be so good at, well at being good that he has a thought. Does this goodness mean that now he is good at everything?

Only one way to find out. A Grand Tournament. Okay, a little more truth here, the Grand Tournament may have been encouraged by The Meanest Goose Society but still, he arranges it all. Of course, he plans to win every even too and hear the whole town cheering for him. But when it comes down to the competition does he have what it takes to be a winner or will he slip back into old habits and be tempted to cheat? Absolutely brilliant!

How to Train Your Dragon School

Cressida Cowell, pub. Hodder Children's Books

Cressida Cowell's note, the one that came with my proof copy of this book, told me that it has been ten years since she wrote and illustrated her first full-length *How To Train Your Dragon* novel and

twenty since she first created the world. Now she is back and what a joy it is to revisit old friends with new stories, or for some of you, to discover this world for the first time ever!

Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third is at the Isle of Berk's Training School for Vikings and Dragons. It is a great school how could it not be – there are Vikings and dragons. But Hiccup isn't the best pupil, in fact he is bottom in pretty much every subject. He treats us to some insight, his first lesson. It was meant to be The Art of Battle. Quiet. Sensible. No trouble. But it turned into Doom of the Darkwing, one of his biggest adventures. Are you ready to settle down for a lesson in how not to do lessons?

Kitty and the Clifftop Peril

Paul Harrison, illus. Jenny Løvlie, pub. Oxford Children's Books

Kitty is a brave young girl who lives up to her name. We all know that cats have nine lives, making them quite fearless. We also know how much they love to climb. Luckily Kitty is brave and not afraid of heights, she often has to climb out of her window at night when her superhero powers are needed and despite being on holiday by the seaside it looks like they will be and very soon.

Kitty is surprised to meet her old friend Cutlass the pirate cat in Pebble Cove. Just as she is there on holiday he is there to see his cousin and get his paws back on a boat. The problem is that someone or something has started to cause trouble down by the harbour and Cutlass is getting the blame for it. Kitty needs her superhero cape and mask so that she can save the day, oh and so that she can enjoy a fabulous picnic with her friends – cookie recipe included!

Marv and the Duck of Doom

Alex Falase-Koya, illus. Paula Bowles, pub. Oxford Children's Books

Marvin, known as Marv to his very closest of friends, yes reader you may consider yourself one, is quite simply, MARVellous. As soon as Marv puts his superhero outfit on he becomes invincible, his powers are infinite. He battles the baddies and after a few heart-stopping pages he seems to usually win the day. But now a blast from his grandad's past has shown up along with a new generation of super-villain.

Grandad and Marv are going to the ~Adventure Zone to meet friends Steve and Izzy. Steve is a reformed supervillain but Marv is about to discover that there is more to Izzy than he realised and when the Duck of Doom appears at the park, powered by Professor Feather 2.0 he knows he is going to have to work hard to save the day. Who knew that ducks could be so dastardly? What a relief that we have superheroes to keep us all safe and save the day! With its black, blue and white colour palette this is a wonderful story, a brilliant series.

Mirabelle and the Baby Dragons

Harriet Muncaster, pub. Oxford Children's Books

Mirabelle is a very special character, because she is different. That message and the series of charming stories she features in, made all the more magical with their splashes of purple colour against otherwise monochrome illustrations, makes her important for younger readers. She is part witch, part fairy and loves nothing more than getting up to magical mischief as often as she can! I'm certain you'll love reading about it!

When Mirabelle, mum and dad, are invited to stay at a dragon sanctuary they say yes immediately. Mirabelle is so excited; this will be an opportunity to get stuck in and help looking after the dragons and show off everything she knows about them. It soon becomes very clear that what Mirabelle thinks she knows and really knows are two different things! Mishaps such as the charcoal crumbling incident are fantastically creative and very funny, showing us all that asking for help and admitting you don't know as much as you thought are the right things to do.

Reggie Rabbit: Robbery at the Masqued Ball

Swapna Reddy, illus Becca Moor, pub. Oxford Children's Books

Presenting readers with a mix of graphic novel and traditional prose this series is lively and exciting, offering readers of all abilities the opportunity to begin their independent reading journey. The story finds us in Bearburgh where we are about to discover what the grandest event of the year is like. It is the Masque family's Masqued Ball. Auntie Hibiscus' catering company are providing food and drink, Reggie Rabbit and Pipsqueak are waiters.

This is going to be the most exciting event of the year because the famous pop star Kitty Qita is going to be performing for the guests. But, as you might have guessed, not everything goes to plan and in the middle of Kitty Qita's performance the lights go out... When they come back on the guests discover all their jewels are missing. Reggie and Pipsqueak are quickly on the case but are the clues leading them in the right direction or do you think there is more to this case than meets the eye?

Watts & Whiskerton: Sabotage at the Fete Cake Bake

Meg McLaren, pub. Piccadilly Press

Watts and Whiskerton are a detective duo. Watts started out, in the first story, as the reluctant detective of the pair. He was certain he didn't have the skill needed to be a great detective like his dad.

But when he met Pearl Whiskerton, a curious cat who loves a mystery he was convinced to give it a try. Now the pair are back for their second adventure. It should be a fun weekend but where these two are there is certain to be a mystery to solve!

Watts is back in Little Gossip, visiting his friends, the Whiskertons, and looking forward to the village fete with its bake off. It should be a great weekend but when the ovens flood with batter and accusations of sabotage fly Watts and Pearl leap into action. This is a curious case, after all who would want to cause a cake catastrophe and ruin the competition? They are looking for proof in the pudding, are you ready to help them find it?

Middle Grade Books

The Boy with Big Decisions

Helen Rutter, pub. Scholastic

Every decision is made for middle-grader, Fred Timple. His parents, Madeleine and John, who don't want to be called Mum and Dad, decide everything for him, right down to the snacks he eats and the hobbies he can spend time doing. But when Fred is pushed into a new school with no notice, leaving behind his best friends, he finds himself faced with an opportunity to make the biggest decision of his life. What would happen if he finally decided something for himself? That's what we, the readers, get to find out as we make Fred's choices and read through the consequences of those actions.

In this interactive middle grade novel, readers take charge! Should Fred take the bus to intimidating Gains school where his parents want him to go? Or jump on the bus to Bowtree that offers a chance for Fred to develop his love of art? Should he sign up for basketball like his father told him to or join the art club and lie about it? Fred also needs to choose who to be friends with and what kind of friend he's going to be. Most importantly, he's going to have to figure out how to talk to his parents about everything he's going through and how frustrated he feels having every decision – big and little – made for him.

The Boy with Big Decisions is a choose-your-own-adventure style story with eight very different endings. In Fred's stories, there are serious life issues to manage – from dealing with kids that have life-threatening health conditions or suspected abandonment and abuse to trying to come to terms with mental health issues at home. The decision tree is not always easy. Choices about following what appears to be the right path often come at tough costs when made haphazardly. Similarly, decisions that might seem obvious or appropriate at first glance can spiral out of control when seen through to the resulting outcomes. *The Boy with Big Decisions* doesn't shy away from difficult subject matter and brings to light some of the challenging pressures facing today's middle school aged children.

Stephanie Ward

The Curse of the Silvan Oaks

Georgia Channon, pub. Pushkin Children's

This is one of the best books I've read in a long time – children's or adult's – and I don't say that lightly. I don't read much fantasy now. But as a child, many of the books I read again and again were fantasy: and apart from *The Lord of the Rings*, they were mostly stories where the fantasy world

collided/overlapped with the real world: C S Lewis's *Narnia* books, Alan Garner's children's books, Susan Cooper's *The Dark Is Rising*.

That's the kind of book this is. The fantasy world is called Sacromund, and the train of events it describes are set off by the battle for a human child fought by Shakespeare's Titania and Oberon. However, do not be misled: this is not a retelling of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The narrative begins several generations after that initiating event, when the Silvan people (Titania's people) are losing their battle against the Penumbrans, led by the magnificently evil Queen Hellebore. She has kidnapped the young Silvan prince, Cory, and imprisoned him – a child – in a filthy dungeon with nothing to eat and the threat of torture and death hanging over him. She is responsible for a terrible curse which has been laid on the Silvans; their trees are dying; their power is weakening.

However, all is not lost, because back in the real world, a girl named Oli discovers a mysterious stone, which has the power to redress the balance, and she finds herself catapulted into this world and war of which she knows nothing.

The book is beautifully constructed, moving at first between the real world and the fantasy one, until eventually the reader is immersed in the fantasy one. The story is gripping. The two children find themselves in terrible danger, in situations where it seems their doom is inevitable. They each go on their personal journey: at the beginning of the book, Cory is convinced that he is a weakling and a coward: by the end he knows he is neither. Oli is understandably wrapped up in her own problems – her father has died, and she has had to move to an unfamiliar new place. But in Sacromund, she has to accept that the fate of others rests on her, and fleeing danger for home is not an option.

The fantasy world is vividly and convincingly realized. I'm always in awe of a writer who can create an entire, and believable world, and Georgia Channon has certainly done that.

A warning: there is a lot of danger and violence. It's a war, Hellebore is evil and merciless, and people die. It might not be suitable for every child – but then, of course, no book is. It's a terrific story and an excellent book – and I very much hope there will be a follow-up.

Sue Purkiss

The Doughnut Club

Kristina Rahim, pub. Nosy Crow

The author writes that in every state school in England there will be at least one child born as a result of either egg or sperm donation. This is definitely something I'd never considered, but it makes you think. Donor conceived Quinn loves her family, but she often feels the odd one out. Not only because she's the only one with red hair and green eyes, but because she would rather be quietly drawing than

surfing or rock-climbing or whatever mad activity her mums and brother Olly might like to do on holiday.

But when Quinn's mums tell her and Olly they have sixteen donor siblings, Quinn is really excited. Maybe one of them will be more like her! The only problem is her parents want them to wait until they are older to contact anyone. As she tries to secretly find out more, Quinn starts to lose sight of what is really important – especially when she starts to believe her worst enemy could be one of her siblings! Can she find a way back to her family, whilst finding a way to tell them how she really feels?

Kristina Rahim masterfully crafts a narrative that transcends a simple adventure story. We see the world from Quinn's perspective and explore well-developed themes that resonate with audiences of all ages. We get an insight into the complexities of families and how each family is completely different and we can see how important it is to be an individual whilst finding your place in your family and world. The characters are well developed, thought out and plotted making them completely believable and relatable.

It's an extremely interesting look at how people deal with being donor conceived in different ways, and how people react when they find out about it. The author's writing style is engaging and written in a way that readers will be able to relate to the issues. The story is written with sensitivity in mind encouraging readers to reflect on their own identities and recognize the significance of individuality within family ties. I'm sure this book will start a lot of conversations.

Helen Byles

Evie and Maryam's Family Tree

Janeen Hayat, pub. Guppy Books

Plenty of different themes are wrapped up in this brilliant little story suitable for 9-12 year olds. Its publication has arrived at a relevant time, as India and Pakistan wrestle with the results of partition once again, nettled today by the presence of nuclear arms. Janeen Hayat, half Pakistani, half New Yorker, lapsed lawyer, teacher, Muslim and Catholic is a self-confessed tangled mass of identities. Who better to write a book like this.

Evie and Maryam, two school friends have nothing in common. Not for one minute do they think that their families are linked, until they are asked to participate in a family tree project together. Maryam is a clever child who chooses to stay at home with her family and share their financial concerns about the high street business. Whereas Evie has a wide circle of friends and does not need to worry about her family's finances. The story unravels as they both find a copy of a folder tucked away at home entitled "Family Recipes", the language of which neither of them can decipher. This leads them to Delhi in 1929 and onwards to WW11. The seeds of partition and the birth of the anti-colonial Indian

Independence movement are mentioned along with the role of Bletchley Park. A book that ticks lots of boxes at school level too from world history to relationships, all packed into one story.

As the author's first book it makes a compelling read, illustrating empathy, the importance of friendship bonds and compassion. It addresses bullying and the complications of modern childhood relationships along with finding your place in the world, family history and above all the magic of coincidence.

Elizabeth Negus

Felix and the Future Agency

Rachel Morrisroe, illus. Paddy Donnelly, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books

Felix is struggling at school. His grandfather, a ghost, gives him premonitions that Felix acts upon, trying to warn potential victims. Unfortunately, rather than being grateful, the school believes Felix is causing the trouble, is at the root of the problems they are having and asks him to leave. Felix, who struggles with dyslexia and with many of his subjects, is secretly relieved. He's then enrolled in Sparkleton High School, in London, an institution for "challenging pupils" whose sole purpose is to educate those challenging pupils. Though initially upset to leave his Gran in Bangor, Felix is soon captivated by his new home, the Magic Mile.

Any worries he had are over when he meets Lydia, who takes him on an exciting tour of his new home, the so-named Magic Mile, where there is a tea shop with tea of all flavours - including jam doughnuts apparently - and flying cupcakes. It is exciting for young Felix as not only does this place appear magical but it is here that he hears all about the 'Future Agency' where magic is celebrated and powers are developed to look into the future to help prevent disasters. Felix already has the special talent of Spirit Speaking - and is highly talented. He begins to develop new skills like reading stars (with hopes of producing his own celestaur) and dream weaving. But when his premonitions hint at a looming threat, Felix and his new friends Luke and Eira must work together to uncover the source of the evil.

This is a fun, adventurous story full of magical surprises that many will enjoy.

Hayley Reeve

Finders of Silverthorn Forest

Rachel Chivers Khoo, illus. Laura Catalán, pub. Walker Books

Tuftorous Snook, Tuft for short, is a young Finder, a small furry creature with big ears and long zigzag whiskers. Like every other Finder in the forest, he has a responsibility to salvage lost objects.

He takes all his finds to his treehouse home, where he meticulously curates and somewhat idiosyncratically labels them. Every chipped teacup, every old tennis ball is a treasure. His ragtag approach is evident in his clothing too. On one foot he wears a tatty old slipper, on the other a misfitting wellington boot. Finders have a strong code of conduct, passed down through the generations. All know that humans are to be avoided at all costs. And all live by one unchallengeable rule: Finders Keepers. Both these tenets are suddenly questionable when Max comes into his life.

Max's grandmother has lived in the forest since childhood, and loves it dearly, but now she is getting old, and is going to move away and live with Max and his mother. Her cottage has been sold. The three of them must clear out her belongings, a very sad process for her and for Max. Grandma is deeply upset that she cannot trace a time capsule she made and hid almost seventy years ago. As a child she wanted to be an astronaut, and her capsule was quite a story in the local newspaper. Max promises her that he will try to locate it. Time is running out. The buyer of the cottage can't wait to get his hands on his new property.

Grandma has told Max she had a treehouse. When Max finds it he also finds Tuft's treasure trove. He and Tuft come face to face. Both are equally stunned by the other, and both are worried and suspicious. But when it becomes apparent that the buyer of the cottage has illegal plans to destroy not just the building but the whole of the forest too, they have to set aside their qualms and cooperate.

A very appealing adventure story, the first in a series, with a delightful cast of characters, enjoyable illustrations and a touch of magic. It will be a big hit with 7-10 year-olds. There is a strong but never laboured theme about conservation and recycling. Relationships feature highly – Tuft's and Max's new friendship and growing trust in each other, Max's and Grandma's love for each other, matched by Tuft's and his grandfather's.

Anne Harding

Fishfolk

Steven Quincey-Jones, pub. Firefly Press

Steven Quincey-Jones' debut novel, *Fishfolk*, is an ocean fable about a small family living on a tiny windswept island called the 'High-and-Dry,' which is quickly becoming engulfed by the sea. Apart from twins Luna and Oona and their Grandad Mull, the only things left on the island are some seagulls and seaweed.

Grandad Mull entertained the twins as children with tales about the shapeshifting 'fishfolk' in the sea, who he says are responsible for leaving them orphaned and who for the dwindling size of their island. In Grandad's tales, the fishfolk used magic to conjure up waves and storms that, over time, have

swallowed the shores of their island. But when a fishfolk washes up on the shore and they talk to them, the twins start to question their Grandad's beliefs.

The sisters are presented as reliant on each other, owing to their upbringing, despite their tendencies to feel and act independently. This means the reader can empathize and identify with either character: Oona, who is more considerate and respectful; or Luna, who is more disobedient, wanting to talk to the fishfolk despite her Grandad's warning to not approach them. They soon learn that it is not the fishfolk, but rather climate change, which is responsible for the changes to their island.

For a debut novel, Quincey-Jones' world-building is brilliant. The story is atmospheric and really paints a picture of a small, almost-deserted island in the middle of the sea. It is written from Oona's perspective, in a style of English that is not unlike our own, but which cleverly bends the rules - for instance, nouns are used as verbs. There is an effective balance between childlike moments and more eerie adult ones, making this story appropriate for all ages. Throughout the book, black and white woodcut-style illustrations, similar to the colour one on the cover, are also used to help to portray key moments of the story.

Fishfolk is a thought-provoking novel that invites its readers to discuss its narrative, particularly the close relationship between climate change and old folk tales. It is therefore also a story appropriate for classroom debate.

Chris J Kenworthy

Land of the Last Wildcat

Lui Sit, illus. David Dean, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

A mix of fast paced fantasy and environmental adventure, the *Land of the Last Wildcat* is a story with an important message about how we should care for the natural world, which also raises the question of how ethical it is for humans to study and exploit nature.

Though Puffin Lau adores her scientist mother she is frustrated that they barely seem to speak anymore and that her mother never seems to have time for her. Puffin's much-loved father has died but she still remembers his mantra: 'Laus stand up while other people sit down'. So, when during a chance venture into her mum's laboratory, Puffin discovers the supposedly mythical wildcat - the last kuri - languishing in captivity and depending on her for survival, Puffin decides she will stop at nothing to get it back to Linger Island where it belongs. However, the kuri is rumoured to have the power to heal and blocking Puffin's plans is money-hungry Professor Smoult, her mum's boss, who is determined to steal the kuri's magic, and it seems he won't stop at anything either.

Woven throughout with themes of family and friendships the adventure that follows is full of tension and excitement which is brilliantly interspersed with wonderfully light comedy moments. From

quicksand to underwater tunnels and tropical forests, Puffin and her best friend Lance embark on the adventure of a lifetime and a race against time to save the last kuri.

Puffin is a brilliantly written, fearless, heroine, whilst Smoult is every bit the textbook villain whose final comeuppance is hugely entertaining. With a wonderfully poignant ending *Land of the Last Wildcat* is an incredible debut for all those 9+ who have a love of science, ecology and adventure. Lui Sit is definitely an author to watch.

Tracey Corner

Letters To A Dog

Piers Torday, illus. Alice McKinley, pub. Barrington Stoke

Letters to a Dog by Piers Torday is a really honest and heartwarming book - we loved it. As James lies in hospital waiting for a heart operation to save his life, we learn about his recent struggles through the letters that he writes to a dog at a rescue centre. When the dog replies, and over the week before his operation, they form a deep friendship. James is desperate to adopt the dog but sadly, he is not talking to his dad so that might be tricky.

A must-read for any animal lovers out there, this book is short but really sweet and packs an emotional punch. This novel really captures the profound connection that we have with our pets and will resonate with anyone familiar with that bond. Piers Torday definitely shows the healing power of pets and with Alice McKinley's illustrations it is impossible not to see that even more clearly.

Beautifully formatted, illustrated and printed, it would be ideal for reluctant readers, and is dyslexia friendly as the font is large and accessible. Reader aged 7-12 and any dog-lovers will find this book suits them perfectly!

Parents - be warned - if you don't already have a pet dog, you might get asked for one!

Stephanie Robertson

Wendington Jones and the Lost Legacy

Daniel Dockery, pub. UCLan Publishing

Main character, Wendington Jones, is many things: a daughter, friend and adventurer. She is a unique and inventive character who is out to chase the unknown and the fantastic.

This is the first book of at least two: the second is already available. It is a mystery story, with a brilliant plot which is packed with danger and peril. There is a mixture of thrilling action and history, and the story is in parts heartbreaking and heartwarming, a well-woven plot with great characters making it incredibly readable.

Wendington, along with her friend and fellow adventurer, Rohan, spends much of her time in this story rushing across Europe giving chase to the missing Tsarina, hoping to save her. *The Lost Legacy* of the title is part of this chase and the mystery that gradually unfolds. Along the way new characters make an appearance including, of course the young princess, Anastasia Romanov and Rasputin, a dead Russian monk and a highly controversial figure in the history of this story. This is a very royal Romanov mystery about a young girl, a princess, who died under tragic circumstances. A very eye-catching front cover sets the scene for this 1920s adventure.

Readers from 10 to 14 years old will be drawn in by the characters and plot and the adventures and thrills throughout this story. The adventure mixes with high society and its masked balls, opera nights, sword fights, spying and sabotage. A very good and exciting read.

Gary Kenworthy

Teen & Young Adult Books

A Witch's Guide to Love and Poison

Aamna Qureshi, pub. Hachette

Bisma is a garden-witch, living in the highest room of a mighty treehouse in the Enchanted Forest. She loves the light on the leaves and the cool air, blowing above well-worn branches - this magical place makes for an excellent home. She shares it with her four sisters, all of them Unwanted Girls: cast out or abandoned as children but taken in by the forest and protected among its trees. As Bisma turns eighteen, she becomes *baji*: the eldest girl and head of the family, taking over from her older sister Eva. According to the forest's traditions, Eva must depart - forging a new life for herself and leaving Bisma to raise four young girls. Bisma feels far from ready: she can provide for them by selling her potions, but even this is tricky. Heading into Old Town means facing a whole current of hostility: unwanted girls are shunned by many villagers, who hold an even sharper scorn for Bisma...

At ten years old she crafted a vicious poison, to avenge the mistreatment of her sister Luna. Bisma's anguish, and the deep-rooted magic in the forest's soil, had been strong enough to cause lasting damage to Luna's father. Afterwards a small stream of women emerged, seeking similarly fearsome concoctions- often desperate to curb men's violence with yew-berries, valerian and nettle. For the rest of the townsfolk, Bisma is a stain: rotten and dangerous. But she knows danger comes in many forms - for her, it takes the shape of Xander Chapman, son and heir of The Chapman Apothecary. With his flowing white shirt and copper-leaf hair, in a sumptuous waistcoat the colour of his eyes, Xander's confidence and charmed existence are infuriating - not to mention untrustworthy. He seems to be considerate of Bisma, and is certainly attentive, but his perfect life is worlds from her own. Her faith and affection have been crushed once before - she won't so easily entrust them again.

Bisma is a vivid character, and her love of potions runs as deep as her love for her sisters. The strength of her magic, and that of the forest, feels exciting, with the way she does not shy away from nature's more destructive side. When destruction comes for her sisters, she needs a strong ally, and wrapped in panic she may not be as selective as she would wish. In desperation, she might have to trust the one she would rather avoid...

Jemima Breeds

Blood Beneath the Snow

Alexandra Kennington, pub. Hodder & Stoughton

The Author's Note appears very clearly prior to the beginning of the novel *Blood Beneath the Snow* and lists many aspects of it which might not be suitable for younger YA readers. Alexandra Kennington gives us the opportunity to decide whether her novel is appropriate for older teenage readers and it's interesting to compare the different attitudes to material on film and in literature. The 'explicit sex scenes' which is one of at least eighteen warnings which are included in the Authors Note would be unlikely in the UK to permit the public showing of an age 15 and probably also an age 18 film.

Blood Beneath the Snow is, like so many YA books at present, written and originally published in America. Why are the American publishers unable to provide English readers with correct spelling for publication in the UK? Not going to help UK youngsters with their exams...

Having listed the annoying publishing and uncertain adult issues, the book itself is largely a very good novel! The names and depth of snow are from the far north, and there are kings, queens, tyrants, priests, young friends and enemies, and soldiers, all of whom are constantly in fear of the many bloody (and certainly lots of blood) battles involved in their lives. Revna, who tells her story, is the daughter of the King and Queen, but there is no love between them. Choosing a new king and queen calls for the death of the siblings, all bar one, and Revna is determined to be the one to take the throne. But just before the Bloodshed Trial Revna is kidnapped by the mysterious and terrifyingly powerful Hellbringer, the greatest enemy in her country. Revna is certain he will kill her, but despite this he begins to teach her how to fight, and her hatred of Hellbringer begins to change quite radically before he seems to vanish from Revna's life.

Well written, exciting and very bloody in this first novel, readers will eagerly await the second novel to discover whether Revna and Hellbringer are reunited and what further danger lies ahead!

Bridget Carrington

The Floating World

Axie Oh, pub. Hodderscape

Axie Oh's new novel, *The Floating World*, is a Young Adult 'romantasy' adventure about Sunho and Ren, who are drawn to each other despite not initially knowing that they are enemies.

Ren is an acrobat travelling with her adoptive family. During one of their performances, a human-like demon attacks the village and her uncle is wounded with poison. After killing the monster with her secret power, the 'silver light,' she begins a journey over the mountains to where the creature came from - a place from where she, herself, fled ten years ago - to save her uncle. On her journey, she meets Sunho, a former soldier who woke up alone with only his name and his sword. He has no recollection of his life before two years ago. To earn an income, he has done mainly odd jobs, until he

discovered that there is a huge reward for any mercenary who can hunt down a girl who wields silver light. When he crosses paths with Ren, Sunho does not realise that she is his target. This sets up a story of romance and conflict and throughout the novel, their romance is a slow burn. This is a good thing, however, as their romance is given time to grow and blossom naturally instead of feeling rushed.

Axie Oh's world-building is fantastic, as she has woven information so cleverly into the narrative as to make the reader interactively feel part of the story. The novel itself reimagines the Korean legend of the *Celestial Maidens*; the mythology, as well as the beautifully crafted world, means that any reader familiar with Studio Ghibli films will be right at home with this novel.

While Sunho and Ren are the centre of focus, it would have been nice to see more of the side characters that pop up in the story. Thankfully, *The Floating World* is the first of a duology, so hopefully we will not have long to wait to see more of the ensemble in the sequel.

Chris J Kenworthy

Like A Love Story

Abdi Nazamian, pub. Little Tiger

Reza has come to New York from Toronto via Iran. The year is 1989 and it is the height of the AIDS crisis in New York. As an Iranian to even think he is gay, as Reza does but has not yet admitted to himself, could be fatal in Iran. And America doesn't feel safe either because of the fear of AIDS. At school he meets Judy and Art.

Judy is a plus-size girl who really wants to be a fashion designer. She and her best friend, Art, who is the only recognised and open gay teen in their school, have been close since they were children. She also idolises her uncle Stephen who was a lawyer, is gay and is dying of AIDS as the novel starts.

Will Reza have the courage to recognise his sexuality and to admit to his attraction to Art, which will break Judy's heart as she has been in a heterosexual relationship with Reza? How will the three teens cope with Judy's uncle's unfolding illness? What impact will it have on their lives and how will readers react to the honesty shared? The author's portrayal of Uncle's Stephen's circumstances and their effect on all those around him, is detailed, deeply moving and sometimes heartbreaking. This is particularly the case with Stephen's death scene which is certainly emotional and a brave inclusion on the part of the author.

This book is worthy of every accolade.

Rebecca Butler

Odd Girl Out

Tasneem Abdur-Rashid, pub. David Fickling Books

It isn't incredibly unusual to feel as though you are the odd one out, in fact it should, in my opinion be celebrated but getting to that stage may take longer for young people to accept which is why Tasneem Abdur-Rashid's book is such an important one.

Maaryah is just fifteen-years-old when her parents' divorce finds her having to leave the only home she has known in Dubai and move to London. I can imagine that would not be fun. From the warmth and sun to the questionable British weather! On top of that this fashion, k-drama, old-school hip-hop and trainer loving girl was planning to start Year 11 in her school, the one she and her friends ruled over, were going to be top girls at. She is not only saying goodbye to her home, her school, her friends but also to all the luxury she has always known. I may be painting her as spoiled and you may get that impression when first meeting her but this is the only life she has known, a life in which she knew who she was, in which she knew how to fit. In London the weather and life are dreary. On top of that the life part is about to get complicated.

School is okay, there are some fun house parties, the boys are fit (young person speak for hot, handsome!) But she is feeling isolated, she is the only hijabi in her school and the school is huge. She still needs answers about her parent's divorce and another bombshell is coming. When it rocks her world she is going to have to stand strong and tall but can she, does she have the strength to stay true to herself when everything around her is putting her to the test? Maaryah is an authentic voice and her truths are incredibly important for teen and YA readers, I for one was hooked on her story and her story resonated.

This is a gripping, honest read, one to settle down with as it will keep you in its thrall.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Throne of Khetara: His Face is the Sun

Michelle Jabès Corpora, pub. Sourcebooks

In the kingdom of Khetara the future is uncertain. When the queen gave birth to twins three unknown women appeared to assist with the births, disappearing as quickly as they had arrived. When questioned none of the Palace servants knew anything of them. Fast forward a few years. The triplets are now seventeen and the royal court continues to revel in decadence, parties, riches, food aplenty, under the waning power of the ailing pharaoh. Whilst he continues to ignore the unrest to the south of his kingdom fate continues its inexorable march knowing that it is bringing with it sweeping change...

Meryamun was the first born of the triplets and he lusts for both power and success. Sitamun was the second and finds herself caught in a web of sensuality of her own making ~ our first hint at this is her witnessing, purposefully, a tryst between two servants in the palace gardens ~ whilst the youngest, Bakenamun, has found refuge in the temple and its ancient knowledge. Then there is Neff, not a royal but a young girl, daughter of a scroll maker, who is plagued by blood-soaked nightmares. None of them realise, not the royals or even Neff's own family, that she is the one who holds the key to all their destinies. Raetawy a farmer's daughter in the south is inspiring an army to rise against the pharaoh and Karim, a young tomb raider is about to awaken a monster. As these plot twists unravel in front of our eyes we can do nothing but watch...

Unknown to all of them there is one who sees them all, the palace cat. She has been seeing all, almost invisible to those around her, for centuries. Her prologue tells us she wonders if she might have been around too long but she realises that she likes to be all seeing and even more that that she rather loves the worship lavished on her...

So begins an epic fantasy trilogy that will have you begging for more and reaching for those Egyptian mythology books! Well-researched, well-written and utterly captivating this story brings Egyptian mythology to life in new ways and of course with plenty of artistic licence but that is what makes it so incredibly readable and unpredictable. I am not sure I have enough patience to wait for the next instalment, perhaps I will start reading this one again to make sure I, like the cat, have missed nothing!

Louise Ellis-Barrett

When the Bones Sing

Ginny Myers Sain, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books

When The Bones Sing is a tense, thrilling and romantic murder mystery about a teenage girl who hears the bones of the dead sing.

Seventeen-year-old Dovie doesn't believe in magic despite her family's history of hearing the dead sing. There has been a continuous chorus of bones calling out to Dovie for the past few years, pleading for her to find them and dig them up. The hiking trails are filled with miles of tracks, and there is a killer on the loose, who is grabbing hikers from them only to leave them in dismembered form on the side of the road. There appears to be no end in sight to the increasing number of bodies that are being found. There has been a growing belief among the old-timers that people are being snatched off the Aux Arc Trail by the monstrous Ozarks howler. Dovie doesn't believe in the howler, and she doesn't believe her best friend Lo when he says he has been terrorized by shadows, even though he claims to be haunted by dark shadows as well. When they start singing, she focuses exclusively on her talent,

guiding the sheriff to the bones, reuniting the dead with their families, but the truth of their deaths is buried far from their bones. A difficult task must be accomplished by Dovie and Lo if they want to rescue anyone else from being killed.

I found this story gripping from the start and the twists along the way kept me guessing until the end. If you enjoy YA fantasy thrillers with a touch of romance then this is book for you!

Katy Ralph

Where Shadows Meet

Patrice Caldwell, pub. Hot Key Books

This might look like one book. It is, but it contains two romances, they span eons and they show us the gods and vampires as we have never seen them before. Prepare to lose yourself in this romance of sacrifices which bares its soul and almost asks you to do the same.

The gods created humans and vampires, they weren't kind or careful about who or how they created which is how both Favre and Thana came to be. Favre's mother had been used by the gods for her powers but rather than protect Favre after her mother's death the gods abandoned her to her isolation. That is until the princess, Thana, found her and something happened between them causing Favre to sacrifice her beautiful wings for love. That was 1,201 years ago and Favre has never overcome the loss of her wings, nor has she overcome the loss of Thana. She gave up her wings for the princess who sacrificed that love for power. Thana's choices led to an eternal night, then destruction. Now Favre wants to resurrect Thana. But the world is a different place now and there are an ancient race who can only survive on the blood of humans, who are also intent on carrying out their own plans.

Evil has never been so captivating as it is in this story. That might seem an unusual statement but there is something about the pureness of love, something so very beautiful that it transcends all that we might conceive, becoming blacker than the darkest night. The story that Patrice Caldwell weaves with this is utterly captivating. She has created a world that has tangled around itself in its quest for power, a world that we must all hope we never see but which entrances us through her use of powerful, poetic prose and a tightly woven plot. An incredibly emotional story that is almost impossible to put down this is a work of art filled with tender romance and sharp twists.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

While We're Young

K.L. Walther, pub. Electric Monkey

Publishers today seem to be lapping up a great number of American tomes (and they are frequently very much tomes) which are clearly tales of north American life, while over the water (i.e. the UK) a thin dribble is drowned by comparison with the Tsunami from the West. There are many excellent books which America publishes, but there need to be many more British, and translated European, teenage novels for YA readers. This is one of the latter.

As a tale following a group of YA friends, who are about to graduate on into college, *While We're Young* is a deep and thoughtful story of teenagers whose long-term friendships through school have, in part, ruptured. Inspired by a popular teenage American comedy film which is well known in the US, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, Walther's book has transported a very similar story from screen to novel, and from 1986 to forty years later than the original. It would be interesting to discover how many teenage readers who are not in the USA are familiar with the film and its subsequent 1990s television series. Having said that, Walther's updated edition is a carefully thought out, well written and inspiring novel in many ways.

Quite accurately the main characters, Grace, James, Everett and Isa, are both excited and terrified by the thought of moving on from school and to top-notch colleges, and their parents are frequently the causes of concern. The main character, Grace, has decided that she must try to reconcile all four erstwhile friends before they depart to their/their parents' choice of college, and to do this she needs to organise a means to do so. Whilst UK school and college are very different from American seventeen-year-olds, the concerns, relationships and the deep-down mental health issues are very similar and offer teenage readers of all countries means of resolving their concerns and of helping their friends and family. Funny, sad and uncertain of their lives ahead, nevertheless they come to terms.

Bridget Carrington

The Wycherleys

Annaliese Avery, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books

I was so excited when I heard I was going to be reviewing *The Wycherleys*, A new Young Adult/Teen romance novel by Annaliese Avery. As a fan of Avery's *The Nightsilver Promise*, a middle grade fantasy set in a magical world, I was already aware of just how detailed and immersive her writing can be. But this was a new genre, a Young Adult book that promised love and magical fantasy – a witch romance? The verdict - I was not in the least disappointed!

From the opening line 'Great Aunt Antoinette was dead, but the curse she had carried was very much alive.' Avery plunges you immediately into a witchy world set in Regency London, where seventeen-year-old Aurelia Wycherley is entering her debutante season as a witch. Whilst this should be an exciting time, filled with finding her perfect match to tether her own magic to, Aurelia instead finds

herself the bearer of a family curse, the kind that no witch will want to match with. With no tether, Aurelia faces the prospect of losing her magic entirely by the end of the magical season. But Aurelia is not the kind of teen witch to just give up, she has a fire inside her and will stop at nothing to find a way to save her magic, even if it means forming an alliance with enigmatic arch enemy Jules Nightly. Nightly, the descendent of the witch who originally cursed the Wycherley line, is also searching for a way to allow untethered witches to keep their magic and, enemies or not, they may be each other's last hope.

What follows is a tale of bribery, extortion, mystery and magic. As dark forces threaten both families and the magical world in which they live, Nightly and Aurelia fake a courtship to navigate the magical debutante season, through a trail of glittering balls and perilous quests as they desperately search for a cure. As the danger grows, romance creeps up on them and the stakes grow ever higher. The book climaxes in an exciting finale that cleverly hints at what's to come in the next instalment.

The Wycherleys is a book that delivers on every level! Think Witches of Bridgerton, broomsticks and ballgowns, romance and murder. Annaliese Avery has cleverly mixed period drama and magical fantasy together to deliver a story like nothing I've read before. The only downside...waiting for Volume Two!

Tracey Corner

Non-Fiction Books

A Year of Black Joy – 52 Black Voices Share Their Life Passions

Jamia Wilson, illus. Jade Orlando, pub. Magic Cat Publishing

Jamia Wilson, the curator of this vibrant and inspiring anthology, began with a simple but powerful question: “What brings you joy?” She posed it to 52 Black individuals from across the globe, each with a unique story, background, and passion. The responses she gathered form the heart of *A Year of Black Joy* - a beautifully illustrated and engaging book that celebrates the richness and diversity of Black experiences.

Each contributor is spotlighted over a double page spread. One page is devoted to a personal narrative, where they describe their passion - how it began, what it means to them and how it shapes their identity. On the opposite page is a related non-fiction element that enhances the reader’s understanding or offers practical advice. For instance, lifestyle blogger Dr. Marie Lahai shares savvy social media strategies; chef Andi Oliver includes a mouthwatering recipe for Spiced Squash and Caramelised Red Onion Skirlie; renowned space scientist Dr. Maggie Aderin-Pocock provides tips for stargazing; and filmmaker Nganji Mutiri contributes a reflective and expressive poem.

The breadth of topics is astonishing - ranging from science and food to poetry, music, and activism - making this book a true celebration of joy in all its forms. It is not only a delightful read but also a wellspring of creativity and inspiration. While the book is primarily aimed at children aged 7 to 9, its appeal is far broader. Older children will find much to enjoy and reflect upon, and educators or parents can use it as a springboard for conversations about careers, identity and the many ways joy can be expressed and nurtured. A must for the school library too.

With its uplifting tone, contemporary relevance and joyful energy, *A Year of Black Joy* is a book to dip into, share and return to again and again.

Barbara Band

Bridges

Magda Gargulakova, illus. Jakub Bachorik, pub. Post Wave Children’s Books

Post Wave Children’s Books explain that they “acquire and translate original, beautiful, fun, clever books that visually delight, entertain, inspire and help children to discover the world around them.” This claim is so true for this book, a brilliant, fascinating and very informative book about every type of bridge from around the world. Its large format is bursting with illustrations, line drawings and

comic strips. There are lists of facts, such as different words for a bridge. There are fun activities for young readers to try out, including a double page maze activity and ideas on how to build a spaghetti bridge.

The book provides a very comprehensive journey and discovery of bridges. We learn that no two bridges are the same. There are every size, from small to enormous; complex, modern and simple, ancient bridges. Many questions are posed and answered in detail. Starting with what are bridges? How can bridges help us? The reader will discover how bridges can shorten our journeys. Illustrations show how bridges cross deep valleys, rivers, roads and even seas. Lots of amazing and different bridges are mentioned, including Tower Bridge in London, Sydney Harbour Bridge, Charles Bridge in Prague, the Forth Bridge in Scotland and the Brooklyn and Golden Gate Bridges in America. Discover how to build a bridge, including the preparation, the construction and the materials needed. Famous bridge builders are included, such as Thomas Telford and Brunel. Different types of bridges are explained, like suspended, lifting, aqueduct, beam, truss, arch, cantilever and bridges for cars, trains, people and animals.

This really is the most amazing, comprehensive and detailed account covering the architecture, history, engineering, the geography and science of bridges. There is even a look at fables and mythology around bridges in different cultures. For everything bridges, told in a fun and informative way, this book is well worth a look.

Gary Kenworthy

Can You Get Music on the Moon?

Dr Sheila Kanani, illus. Liz Kay, pub. Penguin Random House Children's Books

Can You Get Music on the Moon? is a brilliant new scientific book which explores the world of sound, from earth all the way to the moon!

Full of fascinating information, this book explores everything from why certain animals make certain sounds (for example, dolphins making clicking sounds) to why music makes us feel good. The did you know facts on the different pages are interesting and very varied as well – nuggets of knowledge such as the fact that wolves can eat up to 9kg in one go break up the bigger amounts of text for the reader. This adventure through sound and space is a great read for all those budding scientists who love learning about how sound is made and travels in different environments. There is even a lecture theatre in London – the Royal Institution – which is specially shaped to ensure that the acoustics are perfect; if you stand in the middle of the lecture-theatre, anyone in the room can hear you without even needing to use a microphone!

Dr Sheila Kanani is a planetary scientist and a space educator with a background in astrophysics and astronomy who has been rewarded an MBE for services to astronomy and diversity in physics. She is not only incredibly knowledgeable but is able to share her knowledge in an interesting and engaging way for children. Liz Kay's illustrations are superb – often filling the centre of the page while blocks of colours border the text. The book is ordered into different sections which each explore sound in a different context before answering the final key question – whether you can actually get music on the Moon.

Any child who reads this book will become an expert on all things sound and be able to show off their incredible knowledge to all of their friends.

Tom Joy

How To Be Disabled and Proud (or at least kinda sorta okay with it)

Cathy Reay, illus. Jaleel Hudson, pub. Puffin Books

In this book Cathy Reay, who is herself disabled, has created a supportive guide to navigating the challenges of growing up. The content is divided into sections – Am I Even Disabled Anyway?; Family Matters; Back to School, BIG and SCARY School; Forever Friends; Your Changing Body; Hospitals, Doctors and All That Medical Stuff; YOU Can Help Change the World; The World of Work and Disabled and Proud (Or at Least Kinda Sorta Okay With It). This approach helps readers to dip in and out.

Reay is always empathetic and comforting. The language is conversational. Sometimes she draws on her own life experiences or includes comments from a wide range of disabled changemakers and friends, including Ellie Simmonds, Jameisha Prescod, Nina Tame, Shani Dhanda and Simon Wheatcroft. Their insights are valuable, and they are role models reminding readers that any kind of career is possible. Throughout the book Reay emphasises to readers that they are normal and important. They are given advice on how to assert their needs and consider how they can advocate for themselves and others. The book is also relevant to parents and carers and children who are not disabled. This content is serious but there is also warmth and humour and Jaleel Hudson's illustrations are fun. The presentation involves a variety of techniques such as different fonts, speech bubbles, lists, bullet points and sections where readers can add their own notes and jottings. At the end of the book there is an excellent glossary, a list of disabled icons, reading recommendations, and some organizations and resources.

An empowering read that encourages disabled readers to value and appreciate themselves for who they are, exactly as they are. It is also a powerful call to action for both disabled and non-disabled people to create a more accessible, more understanding world. Highly recommended for age 9+.

Brenda Marshall

How To Be A Ladybird

Laura Knowles, illus. Steven Wood, pub. Dorling Kindersley

Non-fiction but not as we know it! This charming introduction to all thing's ladybird utilises a clever graphic novel format, breaking all the detailed information into humorous little bite sized chunks. Perfect for keeping little ones engaged whilst they learn things like the ladybird's life cycle from egg to adult lady bird, the predators they may encounter, all the different types of ladybird complete with stats like size and habitat and lots more...

The narrator is a hilariously named grasshopper called Charles Darwing who moves the story along through time, tying everything together really nicely. The book gives in depth descriptions with lots of scientific detail peppered amongst the comedic anecdotes. There is a spread towards the end of the book about how children can help ladybirds which is a lovely interactive way to round off the story.

The bright, characterful illustrations are the cherry on the cake of this highly original, enjoyable and informative read. A must have on any children's non-fiction bookshelf!

Krina Patel-Sage

It's A Brave Young World

Anu Adebogun, illus. Soofiya, Lila Cruz, pub. Little Tiger

This book presents readers with a guide, one that is designed to help young girls navigate the challenges and complexities of growing up. There are many subjects covered, providing a wealth of information, including friendships, crushes, mental health, consent, and the effects of social media.

Illustrated throughout, it is filled with helpful tips and activities in every section of the book. Even though the text covers a wide range of topics, the format and style of writing make the text a very accessible resource for anyone looking for answers, or just wanting to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. The reader has the option of choosing a topic to work through, or dip in and out of, text and information as they see fit by selecting it.

The book has an attractive, colourful design and is aimed at readers aged 11 and older. It is packed full of clear, interesting information, short stories, and fun activities which will allow young girls to learn the most important things about growing up. In my opinion, this is an inspirational book that grown-ups will find as a valuable resource to spark conversations with teenagers about topics that are important as we progress through our lives.

It's A Brave Young World is exactly the kind of book that I wish someone had written when I was a young girl.

Katy Ralph

Minibeasts

Rosie Neave, illus. Mary Atwood, pub. Magic Cat Publishing

What could be a better gift to accompany a book about minibeasts than a nifty little magnifying glass to help you see the tiny creatures in detail? The pop out magnifying glass has handy mini rulers printed either side to make measuring any nature discoveries nice and easy. The magnifying glass not only encourages children to take a closer look at details illustrated in the book and real life plants and creatures but also allows them to read the answers to some of the questions featured in the book, as they are written in tiny text. This detail adds another layer of engagement for the reader.

This book truly encourages children to engage with their natural surroundings in a curious and respectful way. The first spread includes information on preparing to go outside and explore as well as explaining how to use the book to its full potential. Subsequent spreads go into detail and are organised into either different groups of minibeasts such as beetles or butterflies or a specific element like body parts, or how certain minibeasts move about or camouflage themselves amongst other things.

Packed full of fascinating details and realistic illustrations, readers are bound to learn something new when delving into this book. The second to last spread gives useful tips on how to “be a friend to bugs” which rounds off the environmental feel of the book really nicely. Readers are bound to enjoy the final interactive treat, an illustrated list of over 90 categorised bugs listed on the back end papers ready for little explorers to spot on their adventures. If there’s one thing this book does spectacularly well, it’s enticing children into the outdoors to engage with the natural world.

Krina Patel-Sage

Owning It: Our Disabled Childhoods In Our Own Words

ed. Jen Campbell; James Catchpole; Lucy Catchpole, illus. Sophie Kamlish, pub. Faber

This book enables readers to hear the real voices of disabled people as they tell their own stories, in their own words. The twenty-two writers are varied and diverse from a range of countries including the United States, Norway, Nigeria, Canada, Iraq, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. The stories cover a wide range of subjects and disabilities.

Contributors include Elle McNicoll who recalls being removed from her regular classroom for Special Needs lessons: “I might as well have worn a sash with the letter A for Autistic written on it. I felt branded. I was wearing a label I didn’t understand and I didn’t know how to fit into it.” Ashley Harris Whaley who talks about playing volleyball with cerebral palsy: “What people usually misunderstand about CP is that the issue isn’t really with the muscles and the tendons. The issue is with the brain, which controls all of these things! So my reaction times are slower than slow. Volleyball needs you to be quicker than quick. My muscles needed my brain to always think three steps ahead in order to not miss any passes, digs or sets. And since my brain couldn’t quite manage that, quite a few balls were missed!” And James Catchpole describes the moment when he decided to stop using his prosthetic leg and walk with one leg and crutches. It proved to be an important turning point.

There is a lovely moment when Jan Grue recalls a special memory. He drove his wheelchair onto ice and a “comet’s tail of children” followed. Ali Abbas’ thought-provoking story explains that he was so badly injured in war that a journalist took his photograph and it immediately went viral. Ilya Kominsky reminisces: “Years ago, my father told me a story of a man who, when he couldn’t hear, got down on all fours and bit into a piano leg, so he could hear the music with his teeth.” Each of these stories is incredibly real and hearing them told is incredibly important for young people.

The book closes with information about the authors, who are excellent role models. Owning It is a special book that offers opportunities to gain insight into disabled lives, and to consider how the actions and attitudes of adults influenced the young people. Don’t miss it!

Brenda Marshall

This Is Us: The Story of a Family*

Emily Hamilton, pub. Bloomsbury

This charming picture book shows a family in which the younger of two daughters uses a rollator walker. For her, sometimes a place can be too noisy, at other times her words don’t come out properly. There are good days, and bad days, and she is naughty like any other child (drawing on the wall is one great example of this!) Sometimes she needs a lot of help, but she is part of a family, and they muddle through.

The story is occasionally told in little boxes, as if in photos, and is embellished throughout by, supposedly, the child’s own illustrations, complete with unorthodox spelling (the horse feeld), so this does give a sense of linking with the little girl’s inner life.

Emily Hamilton, author and illustrator (and not be confused with an American sci-fi author of the same name), may be known to some readers as she is the illustrator of *The Yawnicorn*, *The World*

Made a Rainbow by Michelle Robinson and *Thank You for the Little Things* by Caryl Hart. A self-taught illustrator, in her words “loves to transport herself into the world of children's books so she can draw every day and wear her pyjamas to work.” She has two daughters, one with a rare genetic condition, so she uses the experiences of her own family, and absolutely understands the difficulties, and positive aspects, of life with a disabled child.

Diana Barnes

*Note from the editor: I wasn't sure if this should be in picturebooks or non-fiction, I landed on the latter because I feel it shares a true perspective on living with a disability.

The World's First Human Cannonball: and Other Incredible Jobs

Mike Barfield, illus. Franziska Höllbacher, pub. Templar Books

This engaging and entertaining book explores an extraordinary variety of quirky professions, both historical and modern. Bursting with fun facts and cartoon-style illustrations, it takes readers on a journey through eight themed sections: Going Places, Body Works, Nice Work, Risky Business, Working Wonders, Work Hard Play Hard, Arts Work, and Dirty Work. Each chapter dives into unusual jobs with humour and curiosity, blending graphic novel storytelling with fascinating real-life details that are sure to captivate young readers.

Some of the jobs featured are no longer around—such as the royal 'Groom of the Stool', whose unenviable task was to assist the king with his toilet needs, or Victorian 'pure finders' who collected dog poo used in the leather-tanning process. Others are very much part of the modern world, like the professional fake wedding guests who are hired in Japan, dog surfing instructors from California, and food stylists who create perfect-looking fake food for the big screen (mashed potato, it turns out, makes an ideal ice cream substitute on film sets!)

The book also celebrates more inspiring roles, like the mobile libraries that travel across remote regions such as Colombia's biblioburros (donkey libraries) and Mongolia's book-carrying camels. Of course, no book on unusual jobs would be complete without Zazel, the world's first human cannonball. Born into a circus family in 1860, she was tightrope walking by six and famously shot as a human cannonball 20 metres across a stage in 1877, thrilling crowds with her daring stunt.

Full of weird, wonderful, and sometimes downright gross facts, *The World's First Human Cannonball* is an irresistible read for children aged 7 to 9. It's the perfect mix of education and amusement, ideal for sparking curiosity and encouraging readers to see the world of work in a whole new way.

Barbara Band

You Decide your Adventure

Bear Grylls, pub. Dorling Kindersley

Bear Grylls offers his expertise and shares his experience to navigate the reader across varied Northern Hemisphere terrain, safely traversing treacherous conditions and avoiding dangerous hazards to finally reach the extraction point. It is up to the reader to make the crucial choices, so be sure to make the right ones.

You Decide Your Adventure repackages a standard guidebook on outdoor adventure in a lively, interactive format. The reader makes their choices, turning to different pages depending on what they decide, literally navigating the book as well as different terrain: open boggy ground, a river, mountains, and following trails as weather conditions and light changes. The book offers some insight into the genuine decisions adventurers have to face, teaching survival skills along the way that will make the difference to completing an expedition. It is really helpful to put these survival skills into context, so the reader can appreciate their importance and hopefully feel encouraged to practice in their garden or out and about in the local area rather than waiting for an emergency in a remote location.

The page formatting also makes the book very accessible. Whilst full of useful information, there is a generous balance of words and pictures. Moreover, the main text is supported with easy-to-read boxouts, using different formats as necessary from paragraphs to bullet points. Bear Grylls gives some top tips throughout the journey on topics including night trekking, setting up camp, food, water obstacles, climbing, fire lighting, abseiling and building a shelter. It can't get better than advice from someone like Bear Grylls. Jake Alexander's illustrations greatly assist with annotated diagrams – for example the basics of how to read a compass or how to find the Polaris (North Star) at night – as well as full colour spreads, allowing the reader to appreciate the changing environments and weather conditions.

You Decide Your Adventure is fun. The reader can take risks, make wrong decisions (and face the consequences), circuitously making their way to the extraction point. It may be an imaginary expedition, but it builds knowledge and skills and communicates, above all, a passion for adventure.

The ultimate outdoor adventure manual for young people aged 9 and above.

Simon Barrett

Board books

A Little Book of Kind

Jess McGreachin

Wow! What A Party!

Alberta Torres

The Bedtime Book

Todd Parr

Look Out! Hungry Shark

Paul Delaney

Look Out! Hungry Spider

Paul Delaney

Match & Sort Colours

Match & Sort Shapes

Mini Pops! Growly Tiger

Isa Piraccus

Mini Pops! Happy Baby

Isa Piraccus

My Best Friend Is An Otter

My Best Friend Is A Turtle

Rose Signs Good Morning!

Rose Ayling-Ellis, illus. Margarida Sampaio

The Secret Powers of Animals

Soledad Romero Mariño, illus Sonia Pulido

Shaped Bath Book: Duck & Friends

illus. Surya Sajnani

Shaped Bath Book: Octopus & Friends

illus. Surya Sajnani

Wow! Look At Me!

Alberta Torres

Picturebooks

A Home Is A Nest

Emma Carlisle

Danny McGee Drinks the Sea

Andy Stanton, illus. Neal Layton

Letters To A Monster

Patricia Forde, illus. Sarah Warburton

Lulu is a Rhinoceros

Jason Flom, Allison Flom, illus. Sophie Corrigan

No One Is Home

Mikolaj Pa, illus. Gosia Herba, trans. Scotia Gilroy

Once I Was A Tree

A Book (with help from Eoin McLaughlin),
illus. Guilherme Karsten

The One and Only You

Shane Hegarty, illus. Ben Mantle

Our Tree

Jessica Meserve

Early Reader books

Amelia Cheeseheart Investigates:

Mummy Mayhem

Cat Weldon, illus. Nene Lonergan

Gordon Wins It All

Alex Latimer

How to Train Your Dragon School

Cressida Cowell

Kitty and the Clifftop Peril

Paul Harrison, illus. Jenny Løvlie

Marv and the Duck of Doom

Alex Falase-Koya, illus. Paula Bowles

Mirabelle and the Baby Dragons

Harriet Muncaster

**Reggie Rabbit: Robbery at the Masqued
Ball**

Swapna Reddy, illus. Becka Moor

**Watts & Whiskerton: Sabotage at the
Fete Cake Bake**

Meg McLaren

Middle Grade books

The Boy with Big Decisions

Helen Rutter

The Curse of the Silvan Oaks

Georgia Channon

The Doughnut Club

Kristina Rahim

Evie and Maryam's Family Tree

Janeen Hayat

Felix and the Future Agency

Rachel Morrisroe, illus. Paddy Donnelly

Finders of Silverthorn Forest

Rachel Chivers Khoo, illus. Laura Catalán

Fishfolk

Steven Quincey-Jones

Land of the Last Wildcat

Lui Sit, illus. David Dean

Letters To A Dog

Piers Torday, illus. Alice McKinley

Wendington Jones and the Lost Legacy

Daniel Dockery

Teen & Young Adult books

A Witch's Guide to Love and Poison

Aamna Qureshi

Blood Beneath the Snow

Alexandra Kennington, pub. Hodder & Stoughton

The Floating World

Axie Oh

Like A Love Story

Abdi Nazamian

Odd Girl Out

Tasneem Abdur-Rashid

Throne of Khetara: His Face is the Sun

Michelle Jabès Corpora

When the Bones Sing

Ginny Myers Sain

Where Shadows Meet

Patrice Caldwell

While We're Young

K.L. Walther

The Wycherleys

Annaliese Avery

Non-Fiction books

A Year of Black Joy – 52 Black Voices Share Their Life Passions

Jamia Wilson, illus. Jade Orlando

Bridges

Magda Gargulakova, illus. Jakub Bachorik

Can You Get Music on the Moon?

Dr Sheila Kanani, illus. Liz Kay

How To Be Disabled and Proud (or at least kinda sorta okay with it)

Cathy Reay, illus. Jaleel Hudson

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