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### **Books Reviewed**

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# Picturebooks

## **Afterward Everything Was Different**

**Rafael Yockteng, illus. Jairo Buitrago, trans. Elisa Amado, pub. Greystone Kids**

How do you set about telling children a story of the Pleistocene age (I copied that word very carefully!)? This is a period of time somewhere between two-and-a-half-million years and the thousand years ago and this is the name it has been given. Not only how do you tell children about this but why? These are two of the questions you may be asking yourself and the answers lie in the breathtaking *Afterward, Everything Was Different*.

Rafael Yockteng, author, and Jairo Buitrago, illustrator have created a story with next to no words. The hardcover I am reviewing has a blurb on the inside front flap giving us some context. There is then the title page, some 8 pages into the story, again, more context. There are no more words until the end of the story, unless you count the cave wall drawings. Yet the story is full of words, all of them unspoken until we open it, we read the illustrations, we tell the story. Then, the book is opened by another, they read the illustrations, they tell the story. There is no end to the stories this book can tell, as a whole or page-by-page.

We see hunters, a group of people searching for a cave for the winter, their fights against animals we have never see the like of, their arduous climbs and searches for safety, all through the eyes of one girl who tells their story through images carved on stone. But where will the story lead you, what will it tell you? Do you see the clothes, the people, animals. Expressions, hairy legs, sharp spears? Some or all, it matters not how much you see but the stories you can create from it and the knowledge you can gain. This is a masterpiece which makes everything different.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **Bravo Avocado**

**Chana Stiefel, illus. Anna Süßbauer, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books**

Avocado sits in the supermarket, surrounded by ‘Specials’: Juicy Peaches, Zesty Lemons, and wants to be Today’s Special too. She asks for advice, and Tomato suggests salsa lessons, but Avocado is not good at dancing. “You’ll ketch-up,” said Tomato.

There are similar puns from other fruit and vegetables: Pumpkin says ‘Oh. My. Gourd.’, Garlic never minces his words, and Olive Oil and Vinegar suggest dressing, which Avocado takes literally, with interesting consequences involving bunting and a silly hat. ‘I’m toast’ wails Avocado, and Toaster ‘pops up’ to advise her to look at herself in his shiny sides. Seeing her reflection as healthy, courageous, and big-hearted, she writes her own sign in those words, and is happy. Broccoli now asks her for help, and she has the confidence to advise a sign saying, ‘edible mini-trees.’

Is this to be taken as a child’s first guide to marketing? Chana Stiefel loves to write ‘punny and poignant’ picture books, and this is fun, but the puns are evidently aimed at the adult sharing this book with a child. It does say on the jacket that it’s for readers of 4-8, so possibly older children in that age-range will get the jokes, though the picture book format may not necessarily appeal. It is an American setting- an avocado costs \$1, but maybe a supermarket looks fairly similar anywhere. Anna Süßbauer’s bright and colourful illustrations will definitely be attractive, but some of the puns will need explanation for the intended child audience.

**Diana Barnes**

## **The Chalk Garden**

**Sally Anne Garland, pub. Sunbird Books**

Do your children love the outdoors? Do they look at all the spaces outside and enjoy seeing flowers, grasses, trees, hearing the birds sing or like the little girl in the story do they yearn for a pretty garden filled with flowers? The book is an inspirational one and was inspired by the chalk drawings of author Sally Anne Garland’s neighbours’ children.

*The Chalk Garden* covers all this, and somehow more too. It is a book that is not only a delight to read and share but it came with activity sheets – instructions on how to make a simple bird feeder using materials anyone should be able to find at home and for a wormery, again with typical household materials being recycled to create it. I will be making use of these with my young Squirrel Scouts!

A young child looks out into her garden and sees only grey concrete, she can hear the whistles and tweets of the birds next door, but they never come to visit her garden. This enterprising little girl takes matters into her own hands and with her chalks she draws some flowers and some trees but still they do not come. When the rain washes her efforts away she is glum, until she spies something green through the cracks in the paving – grass growing through. Dad moves the broken slab and the little girl discovers a world under there, teeming with life and ready to help her dream of a garden come

true. As we read, watch and wait with the little girl we too begin to see a garden grow, one that maybe, just maybe, will encourage those birds to its buds and blooms.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **Holey Moley**

**Bethan Clarke, illus. Anders Frang, pub. Little Tiger Press**

When Mavis Mole meets Gus the Goat, she doesn't realize the funny but frustrating problems that will follow as she tries to tell him where she lives. Gus is a character who loves to speak in a rhyme, so he keeps interrupting his new 'friend' as she attempts to answer his questions. The two main characters are totally different from one another and poor Mavis becomes increasingly frustrated and irritated by her bouncy and excitable new acquaintance.

What follows is a hilarious journey through the English language. This is a truly delightful romp in which the author and illustrator really enjoy the antics of the characters they have created. Children and adults will love the multi layered playing with words and I can imagine young classes making up their own variations of the names.

Beyond all the word play, we have a lot of information about the natural world and what type of homes different creatures have. I love the depiction of the inside of a mole hill and the various different rooms that they are made of. It brings to mind the wonderful depictions of homes in classic *Wind in the Willows* illustrations. The illustrations themselves have great fun in interpreting the text and I really chuckled at mole dressed as Elvis Presley, as they are described as a "Rock n' rolly moley."

This is an absolute delight for KS1 children and their adults.

**Margaret Pemberton**

## **I'm Not Scared**

**Brita Teckentrup, pub. Prestel Children's Books**

Little Hedgehog and Big Hedgehog are back, going on a picnic and enjoying another adventure. 'Oh, come on! I'm not scared at all!' insists Little Hedgehog as they go for a walk in the forest.

Immediately Little Hedgehog must overcome its fears when upon waking, Big Hedgehog is nowhere to be found. When reunited and together in the forest, Little Hedgehog and Big Hedgehog finish whistling their song, but strangely the whistling continues. They come face-to-face with a predator, a fox. And much more dangerous events are to come, lost in the fog, they stray onto a busy road. As

night falls, Little Hedgehog and Big Hedgehog are far from home. Even Little Hedgehog has to admit to being a little bit scared. Skilfully Britta Teckentrup builds and releases the tension as Little Hedgehog and Big Hedgehog face increasingly greater danger, but with a little bit of help from a friend means it all ends happily.

Britta Teckentrup is author and illustrator, and the artwork in this book is outstanding. She mixes bold, structural elements in her work, including strong outlines of the main shapes with an impressionistic style, blending colours, and beautifully capturing the mood of the scene. There is of course the iconic illustration of Little Hedgehog and Big Hedgehog as well as many friends sharing the page, such as a squirrel, a frog, birds and numerous insects, adding interest and inviting curiosity. The illustrations seem almost textural (and I would love to see some of the original illustration for this book).

A great story, *I'm Not Scared* helps readers understand what it means to be afraid – and sometimes there is nothing to be afraid of – however there are moments of genuine danger, but there is also a reassuring message that there is always someone to help and protect.

**Simon Barrett**

## **Ingenious Edie**

**Patrick Corrigan, pub. Flying Eye Books**

In a tiny street, in a tiny town lived a tiny inventor whose name was Edie. Edie loved to invent and every invention she made was always better than the last. It may have been shinier, faster, or even cleverer but it was always better. No one knew anything about Edie's inventions because she loved to work alone, everything she did was top secret. When a mischievous magpie comes to town, snatching away anything shiny and making them all sad Edie knows she needs to invent something to stop him. The trouble is that nothing she does seems to work. Does Edie need help after all?

Edie is a bright spark whose love of inventions will be certain to inspire young readers to have a go at home, or school for themselves, it is certain to spark all sorts of curiosity. Her inventions, the story, are all about encouraging us to get lost in the world of our imaginations. The story that Patrick Corrigan tells does encourage but for me it is the power of the illustration which holds the magic to this book.

There is so much detail in it, there is so much to see, so much going on. From all the different aspects of the town to the parts that Edie uses in her inventions and then all the small ways that everyone can help out - there are inspirations and talking points galore here. This is a miniature world where one girl lets her imagination run wild but it is a big wide world in which we can all do the same and this book encourages us to remember the possibilities are endless.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **Into The Wild**

**Thomas Docherty, pub. Oxford Children's Books**

In a delightful exploration between the real and the imagined, *Into the Wild* is the story of Joe – a young city dweller who loves wild things. At first, he believes that there is nothing wild where he lives but then he begins to notice the bird song and starts to look more closely at his environment. Inspired by his books, TV, toys and posters and the real wild things hiding in the city, he begins to imagine all sorts of animals. Clouds become elephants; graffiti - flamingos; and underpants drying on a washing line turn into bats.

The reader is left wondering just how much of Joe's adventure with the wild things in the city is real and how much is imagined, particularly as the story ends with Joe tucked up in bed dreaming of the wild animals he just encountered.

Beautifully illustrated, with an important message that the wild is everywhere, the reader is invited to look out for wild things in their local environment. This invitation helps contextualise the book and encourages young people to get out and about and explore nature wherever they live.

This book will appeal to children who enjoyed *Where the Wild Things Are* and *The Comet*.

**Pauline Bird**

## **The Mermaid Moon**

**Briony May Smith, pub. Walker Books**

*The Mermaid Moon* is a story of friendship and magic. I haven't seen a mermaid picture book in a while and so it's lovely to read this fairy tale of two best friends, Merrin and Molly from different worlds – Molly lives on land, Merrin in the sea – who have one day a year where they can spend time together in Molly's home village. Mermaids are accepted where Molly lives, and on the night of the Mermaid Moon festival the people of the village enjoy the magic and watch as sea creatures fly in the air, visiting their little community nestled on the shore.

Of course, like any fairy tale there is a deadline to meet for Merrin to return to the underwater world, and if she misses it the magic will disappear from Mermaid Cove forever. So, what happens? Well, as with most modern fairy tales, there is a happy ending so no one will go to sleep worried, but an unexpected problem has to be resolved, and of course, only quick thinking can help.

Briony May Smith writes in a gentle, lyrical tone, and I am sure many a child will snuggle into their grown up as they listen to the story being read. The illustrations mostly are in night-time hues, blues, purples – and dabbled with moonlight – the colours are perfect for the creation of the night of the Mermaid Moon and add beautifully to the enchanting feel of the story. Yellow, orange, and turquoise play across the earlier pages too and Merrin's hair glows with a reddish hue. The illustrations have a beautiful simple quality whilst still providing detail to take in and explore on many of the pages – Molly's bedroom for example holds many a treasure.

Perfect timing for this book with the release of Disney's live action *Ariel* as interest in mermaids is sure to blossom. This is a gentle fairy tale that pulls you in and carries you along. But I'm sure there will be many conversations along the way too about flying fish, dolphins and how having a mermaid as your best friend would be the greatest thing ever.

**Anja Stobbart**

## **My Bollywood Dream**

**Avani Dwivedi, pub. Walker Books**

The bright flashing of disco lights and an Indian family dancing to Avani Dwivedi's Bollywood Dream!

When we think of Bollywood a series of popular dance moves and songs come to the surface even before the plotline tunes into our thoughts! *My Bollywood Dream* by Avani Dwivedi is her billet-doux to the vibrant world of Bollywood in the always-in-a-rush city of Mumbai.

The story in this colourful picture book is bound by the single thread of Hindi songs and dialogues painted over the hustle and bustle of Mumbai. A little dreamer girl loves to visit the cinema each Friday with her family and each time that she goes, each moment she experiences becomes a lived 'filmy' experience for her. We also have a police officer showing some high jumps; the crowd on the bridge joining for a choreographed dance performance and then everyone starts celebrating in the cinema hall as well! The illustrations truly animate the little girl's experiences and imagination as we see her dreams of a future in which she is a director play out.

If you would love to introduce your 4–7-year-olds to some colourful world of Bollywood's creations, this is the book for it, who knows, the future might bring in a newer plot for them too.

**Ishika Tiwari**

## **My Dad Is a Tree**

## **Jon Agee, pub. Scallywag Press**

*My Dad Is a Tree* is a sweet story about a very patient dad who gives in to his daughter's request to be a 'tree.' Although initially suggesting he spends just a minute pretending, he ultimately ends up spending the whole day outside – much to his daughter's delight. Various animals explore this new 'tree', rain falls, night-time arrives but Madeline reminds her father that trees don't mind all those things.

As the dad continues to mildly protest, his daughter appears oblivious. However, the reader is not. This is a brilliant example of a metafictional picturebook where the fourth wall is broken. It's clever and subtle, but the dad communicates with the reader through facial expressions directed towards the reader rather than his daughter. As such, we are left in a position where we understand what the dad is hinting at better than his child in the story.

Alongside the main narrative, there is also a cute mini-story of a baby owl who falls out of a tree and sleeps on the dad all day until its mother awakens it by calling for it at night-time. This could be a good introduction to talking about day and night animals with young children.

A delightful book with hidden depths!

## **Pauline Bird**

### **Rita and Ralph's Rotten Day**

**Carmen Agra Deedy, illus. Pete Oswald, pub. Scholastic**

There are plenty of tales of friendship in picturebook publishing, there are plenty of friendship between two friends but there is nothing quite like *Rita and Ralph's Rotten Day*.

Not only is it small, compared to many picturebooks, published almost in landscape rather than portrait size, it is sparsely worded and intelligently illustrated. It is a tale that will not only make you laugh but help you learn how not to have a rotten day, unlike Rita and Ralph!

Why are Rita and Ralph having this rotten day? Well, therein lies the story. In two little houses, on two little hills, lived two best friends. Every day, without fail, they go down the hill and up the hill, down the hill and up the hill so that they can meet under their favourite apple tree to play their favourite games. It is all wonderful and they have plenty of fun until the day they decide to play a new game. Sticks and stones does not turn out to be a favourite game, but can they learn how to say sorry to one another so that they can meet back at their apple tree to play their favourite games all over again?



The storytelling is outstanding, it is a skill to be able to use few words and yet relay a full story and the illustrations by Pete Oswald are full of the emotions of the children, entirely reflecting Carmen Deedy's words and making this the ideal picture book for helping children to see that games with friends can be the best of fun, sometimes they may not work out but it is really isn't that hard to say sorry.

**May Ellis**

## **Thunderboots**

**Naomi Jones, illus. Rebecca Ashdown, pub. Oxford Children's Books**

Naomi Jones is dyslexic but was not diagnosed until she was 21 years old. She found life challenging as a child but appreciates now that her different way of looking at things can also be helpful. Rebecca Ashdown's daughter is also dyslexic, so together author and illustrator have produced this book accentuating the positive aspects of the condition.

Trixie lives in Primrose Tower, and her multicultural neighbours always know when she comes home, as she runs and jumps, thumps, dances and cartwheels up the stairs and into her flat, hence the nickname 'Thunderboots'. They all wish her good luck as she sets off for her first day at school. She enjoys learning and taking part, sometimes too enthusiastically, but has trouble getting instructions in the right order, and reading and writing are very hard for her. She comes home very quietly one day, and finally tells Dad, a single parent, about her difficulty. Dad explains that everyone learns in different ways, and that he learns differently too: he says it's their superpower. He goes into the school to explain, and the teachers devise a plan for Trixie to help her to learn, so she soon catches up with her friends and comes home noisily again.

Trixie is an engaging little character, with her neighbours, classmates and teachers all illustrated with verve by Rebecca Ashdown, and this story may well be helpful for a child in a similar situation.

**Diana Barnes**

## **Unicorn Not Wanted**

**Fred Blunt, illus. Fred Blunt, pub. Happy Yak**

This is a totally whacky, madcap tale, where a story is hijacked by a Unicorn and a Pug. The author wants it to be a cowboy story, but the two main characters look suspiciously unlike cowboys! The author has used the proliferation of books about unicorns and pugs to try and make a statement and has decreed that this book is free of these creatures. However, they have other ideas and manage to infiltrate the story.

What follows is a hilariously funny discussion between the author and his characters, as they try and find a way of being part of the book.

There is an exuberance and vitality that is really infectious and leads the audience on a roller coaster ride through the possibilities that the unicorn and pug envisage for themselves. I particularly enjoyed the interaction between the two animals, as well as their discussions with the author; this makes the reader feel personally involved in the action. The book itself has a vivid and energetic set of illustrations. The cartoon style is reminiscent of TV series such as *Quick Draw McGraw* (yes, I am that old) but it really works with the concept of a western setting.

There is an underlying theme about how characters are created, and it really shows how they can take on a life of their own and take the author in directions they have not contemplated. This is a brilliant book for KS1 and will spark the imagination of the young readers.

**Margaret Pemberton**

### **Watch Out! There's a Monster Coming!**

**Karl Newson, illus. Zehra Hicks, pub. Andersen Press**

As you meet the hungry monster, you assume he is interested in eating just one thing...and you follow him as he chants and sneaks his way through the story.

Told in a brilliant rhyming pattern, children will find this an easy book to join along with. The surprising twist at the end will have children chuckling away and perhaps craving a sweet treat of their own. As you read though, beware for the monster you are following could be after you. He is good at creeping through the streets and hunting for his favourite snack, he knows what he likes to eat, and he knows it is... sweet... There are plenty of opportunities for lots of fun to be had with this book and after the first, possibly reassuring read, younger children might even enjoy it as a bedtime story.

Karl Newson and Zehra Hicks are an ideal pairing for this story, with the text and illustrations perfectly balanced with each other. Bright, bold and colourful, you can't help but wonder just what the monster wants to eat! Delightful and dark, perfect for ages 3 and older.

**Erin Hamilton**

# Junior Books

## **The City of Stolen Magic**

**Nazneen Ahmed Pathak, pub. Penguin Random House**

*The City of Stolen Magic* is a magical book, written by Nazneen Ahmed Pathak. It centres around Chompa - a brave Indian girl who possesses both writing magic and finger magic - as well as her friends, Leeza, Tipu, and Laurie, as they go on adventures set in 1855.

The story is split into five parts, each part set in a different place (Bengal, Dacca, at sea, London, and the Silver Palace). As the four main characters are Indian, some parts of their dialogue are not written in English, so this can be hard to understand. However, there is a section in the back of the book which explains some of the words, written in-character as Leeza. The book is long, and the plot can occasionally be complicated, which is why I would recommend this book for slightly older readers.

Chompa is an unusual girl, not like any of the other children in her village – she has magic, just like her mother. Chompa has been forbidden to use her finger-magic and is only allowed, as well as highly encouraged, to practise her writing-magic. However, when Chompa breaks this rule, she ends up accidentally destroying the cooking hut. Then, her mother gets kidnapped and taken to London by the British Company, including powerful Devaynes. Determined Chompa, eager Leeza, intelligent Tipu, and brave Laurie must fight to save not only Chompa's mother, but the children that were kidnapped...

I would recommend this book for slightly older people as the plot can occasionally be complicated to understand. The themes of this book are family, bravery, and friendship. The main characters are all very strong, brave, and intelligent, and they get into many difficult situations whilst trying to prevent the Company from taking over Indian magic. Overall, I would say that this book is great for people aged 11-14 and may be suitable for advanced readers aged about 9 or 10.

**Maya Grant (aged 10)**

## **Cosima Unfortunate Steals a Star**

**Laura Noakes, illus. Flavia Sorrentino, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books**

Laura Noakes herself a disabled writer, brings an insightful twist to her debut novel whose heroine is also disabled. It is a heist tale in which a quartet of bright, creative and courageous girls pit themselves against the cruel owners of their orphanage and a dastardly villain. The orphanage is

home to girls “with ailments that make it improper for them to be part of polite society.” The setting is Victorianesque and the plot hinges on a Great Exhibition-style event in London.

Cosima has spent all her life in the orphanage and yearns to find her family somehow. With her three best friends – Pearl, Mary and Diya – she revels in finding ways to outwit and inconvenience the evil Stains who run the home. It is while involved in such an escapade that she discovers a nasty character called Lord Fitzroy plans to take girls from the orphanage and subject them to a questionable scientific “treatment.”

The four girls are determined to get to the bottom of this scheme which is centred around the “Empire Exhibition.” Each of the girls has significant physical and emotional challenges to contend with, but, fortunately, these are outweighed by their sheer ingenuity, creativity and guts. Along the way they pick up clues to Cosima's family history and are ably assisted by the plucky Myles and the indomitable Agatha Noone.

There are plenty of laughs to be had in this story and some great dramatic tension. There are also subtle lessons about disability rights and cultural theft – all very deftly handled by the author. A good read for the confident, mature middle grade reader.

**Rose Palmer**

## **The Deadlands: Hunted**

**Skye Melki-Wegner, pub. Walker Books**

Dinosaurs. Probably the most popular and long-lived topic of any for children of all ages by which I do mean ALL ages. Every time dinosaurs are mentioned here the response we get is a bewildering list of facts and information. I have no idea how they remember it all, but they do!

So, when along came Skye Melki-Wegner's Walker Books published *The Deadlands: Hunted* the older ones could not get their hands on it fast enough. After all, when you see the front cover there is a particularly ferocious-looking dinosaur on the cover and the promise of a story that is all about a fight for survival. A middle-grade action story told from the perspective of the dinosaurs is a unique discovery and a winning read, and this one is the first in a very promising series.

Imagine there was never that meteor that hit the earth, killing off the dinosaurs and that in fact they are still alive and well. Not only that but they have learned to speak, to dream and to wage war.

Eleri is an oryctodromeus. He is a small dinosaur who has been raised in an underground warren unaware of the truth of the world outside. He has dreams though - he wants to become the herd storyteller. There is a problem though, during a battle with some enemy dinosaurs, the pterosaurs, he

makes a decision, he saves ones of the enemy soldiers. The decision brings him before the elders where a trial finds him exiled to the Deadlands. The Deadlands are brutal, and he doubts he will be able to survive them – this scorched desert full of carnivores. Joining forces with a herd of other young exiles brings hope and more dangers. Can he, along with a stegosaur, a sauropod and a triceratops with a short temper save the warring kingdoms from self-destruction?

This is an action-packed adventure which promises more to come and will be loved by children and is certain to re-ignite an interest in the age of dinosaurs.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **Greenwild: The World Behind the Door**

**Pari Thomson, pub. Macmillan Children's Books**

Oh, how lucky I feel to have been sent a copy of this beautiful book to review. It's stunning cover and gorgeous illustrations courtesy of Elisa Paganelli make it feel magical from the start and the incredible story does not disappoint.

Eleven-year-old Daisy is the daughter of famous journalist, Leila Thistledown, and together they travel the globe chasing stories. It's a life Daisy loves, it's the only life she knows. So, when Mum takes a job in the Amazon and leaves Daisy behind at a boarding school it's not surprising that Daisy hates it. Mum promises to be back in two weeks, but just before her return, her plane goes down in the Amazon and all four passengers go missing. And that's not all, something is not right at the boarding school either. It seems that some of the adults around Daisy, including her mother's boss at the newspaper, are plotting something.

Daisy doesn't know who she can trust anymore, but she knows she needs to get away. Taking the mysterious kitten that has befriended her, Daisy runs away heading straight to Kew Gardens where her mother had instructed her to go 'if anything goes wrong'. Here Daisy stumbles upon a secret door to the magical world of Greenwild where Daisy will learn secrets, find danger, and will make friends for life. As Daisy searches for her missing mother, she finds herself faced with the challenge of saving her own world too.

This beautifully written book draws you into a world so complete that you wish you were there. It also sends a powerful message about our planet, how we treat it, and how it's destruction can be irreversible. The first in a new series, *Greenwild*, is a spellbinding treasure for all those who see the magic of the natural world.

**Tracey Corner**

## **Interdimensional Explorers**

**Lorraine Gregory, illus. Jo Lindley, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books**

To Danny, Douglas Wimso is the loving grandfather who seems to be able to find anything Danny mislays and who looks after the local estate. After Douglas is taken suddenly ill, Danny realises that his grandfather is in fact an interdimensional caretaker, whose task is to reunite lost items to the worlds to which they belong. And so, an extraordinary adventure begins.

Armed with his grandfather's watch, Danny, his best friend Modge, and Danny's cousin Inaaya take over the operation and work hard to clear the backlog, taking interdimensional journeys aboard a vehicle they found in Douglas' incredible office. To understand the myriad of languages, the three children have to push a grub into their noses: please, don't try this at home! While the three children visit the facilities of a new distribution centre, Danny makes a sinister discovery. Danny, Modge and Inaaya are determined to stop villains from plundering the multiverse and harming creatures, especially Modge's new-found pet, and work as a team to save the worlds.

Along the way, old friendships are consolidated, and new ones created. Danny's dislike for his cousin Inaaya changes into appreciation of her skills and understanding of the problems that affect her seemingly happy life. Now firmly friends, the three can celebrate the success of the mission and wonder what other adventure the multiverse has in store for them.

With a sequel planned to be released next year, hopefully as engaging and fun as this, readers won't have to wait too long to see Danny and friends in action again.

**Laura Brill**

## **The Last Mapmaker**

**Christina Soontornvat, pub. Walker Books**

Twelve-year-old Sai is fighting for a new life. Born into poverty with a conman as a father, she works and saves to one day escape to a better life. She is employed, under false pretences, as an assistant to an elderly mapmaker in the powerful kingdom of Mangkon.

When an opportunity arises for Sai to join an expedition across the sea, she naively jumps at the chance, giving up everything she has ever known. Soon, she discovers that everything she thought she knew is wrong and that her mistakes may cost her and the entire ship their lives.

From two-time Newbery honour recipient and author of *A Wish in the Dark* comes a new Thai-inspired fantasy adventure story, *The Last Mapmaker*. In this imaginative, coming-of-age middle grade novel, one young girl is faced with a myriad of issues – family ties, loyalty to country,

consequences of unconsidered choices, questioning long-held principles and a moral reckoning. On top of all of this, Sai is struggling just to stay alive on a ship destined for a place even sailors dare not stray. It's a lot for anyone to handle, let alone a twelve-year-old with only one ailing ally on board and no family to return home to.

It was refreshing to read a story about a flawed character who makes mistakes, especially when those errors don't magically become blessings in disguise. Sai's struggles were extreme, often overwhelming, but she was a fighter that never gave up and, in the end, this served her well. It was also interesting to see the young main character at the centre of manipulation – both being manipulated and being the manipulator – putting to question if it's ever okay to convince others to do something wrong. These big moral issues add a charged emotional layer to the adventure story unfolding in *The Last Mapmaker*.

The imagined world with a bold, divided kingdom and the undiscovered mythical world of dragons slowly come together to create a unique setting for the story. The descriptions of life on board a ship – sometimes terrifying, sometimes disturbing, often enchanting – tempt readers to turn the page and find out more about a life at sea as well as the fascinating trade of mapmaking. A complex, highly original and very enjoyable read.

## **Stephanie Ward**

### **Lily Grim and the City of Undone**

**Andy Ruffell, pub. Hodder Children's Books**

Lots of people will like this. It reminds me of nothing so much as the original *Star Wars* film in that it's a high adventure quest that ends on a moment of triumph that is nonetheless inconclusive, there being further tasks and showdowns to come. And, like *Star Wars*, the plot balances on a founding child mystery as events centre around the Lilly Grim of the title discovering her secret origins, aided by the rag-tag band of friends and others that gathers around her. There's a pet hound, I know that's a deal-clincher for some.

Very much a book that treads where many plots have trod before, but also one which recognises that and therefore dwells (successfully) more on world-building, description, atmosphere, and escapades. It's brisk and packed with incident, it's an exciting read, immersive, too. Description locates you squarely in the action, in sewers and on roof tops. There's almost a lynching at one point that is queasily convincing. I felt the jeopardy. It can be relentless. The world is an interesting near-past and near-future mix: Dickensian but divided in the manner of late 1930s Germany between Undoners and Others, with social pressures ramped up by the encroaching seas of a changed climate. Like *Mortal Engines*, a well-thought-out world where Britain has regressed and shrunk, socially and physically. London is Undone.

Others and Othering and the way society scapegoats and victimises is a timely theme and sensitively dealt with, in as far as it's reasonable to in a story that sees our heroes chased by people-eating giant pigs and menaced by the machinations of a classically outrageously panto villain in Undone's tyrant ruler, the Master, who seemingly knows far more about Lily than she does herself.

Well-suited to short-burst, episodic reading, with lots of parts and chapters and revelations, twists and turns, and in-between moments of catching your breath, I'd pitch this to readers around Years 4 & 5. I am disappointed though by the amount of work Lily's new best friend Dekka does in solving her problems, I'd rather she resolved all the key moments herself.

Readers from communities experiencing othering and racism may find the book triggering in places. I think it's to Andy Russell's credit that he achieves these moments of discomfort, but be warned.

**Dmytro Bojaniwskyj**

## **Michael the Amazing Mind-Reading Sausage Dog**

**Terrie Chilvers, illus. Tim Budgen, pub. Firefly**

This is the story of an ambitious sausage dog, Michael, pursuing his dream of Hollywoof fame and fortune. Like any good tale obstacles aplenty befall our determined hero, because where there's a sausage-dog-shaped will, there's also a peanut balancing Chocolate Labrador called Susan, with the same steely determination to see her name up in lights. Who will get there first? Is life in Hollywoof everything Michael dreamed it would be?

Michael's hilariously unfiltered personality rings loud as he recounts his journey from Snuffles-by-Sea to Hollywoof, leaving no doggie treat unturned. Addressing his reader from the start, he draws us into the competitive world of performing pooches. But it takes a chance encounter with Stanley Big Dog (whose introduction cements him into your heart) to unlock Michael's mind-reading ability, and a dynamic double act is born. Once Michael has mastered reading Stanley's mind (big sticks, wees and pork chops) he is soon sweeping through the minds of the rest of the doggy residents in his hometown. When he spots a poster advertising a talent competition, Michael grabs his chance to showcase his skill, get out of Snuffles-by-Sea and take Hollywoof by storm. He gives us all a lesson on how to chew up imposter syndrome and spit it out like an inedible shoe. If only Susan, the town's only celebrity and last year's winner, wasn't a special guest.

Disaster strikes in various guises and Susan's paw is poised ready to snatch the spotlight from Michael at every twist and turn. Will Michael be resigned to watching from the sidelines as Susan takes centre stage? With his dreams of unveiling statues in his honour sinking there are times our hero cannot even summon the energy to put on a glittery waistcoat. But Stanley unwittingly teaches him a valuable



lesson in seeing setbacks as opportunities not failure, and Michael is back to hatching plans for su-paw-stardom.

This cracker of a debut from Terrie Chilvers is packed with cliffhangers and belly laughs, featuring an unforgettable protagonist in Michael who shows the value in not giving up on your dreams no matter how many times you're dismissed as the underdog. It's a heartfelt story about friendship too. Stanley may be the humble, dappy counterpoint but he is just as important to Michael's success. Capturing these loveable characters in all their glory is illustrator, Tim Budgen. The pacing, humour and energy of this book are ideal for readers aged 7-9, Michael's strong voice also makes it fantastic for reading aloud.

## **Matilde Sazio**

### **My Life On Fire**

**Cath Howe, pub. Nosy Crow**

There are some authors that you need to read, who write such thought-provoking books that you stop and think. Cath Howe is one such, and I've read everything she has ever written.

This book focuses on Ren and Casper. One terrible night Ren's house burns down. (Or 'burns up' as she describes it.) Within a few hours Ren loses all her clothes, her treasured possessions, and her home. Her family moves in with her stiff and disapproving gran while her parents try to sort out their insurance claim and keep their business going. But there is nothing to do at gran's house, the food is awful and Ren has to share a room with her little brother. Caspar is missing his older brother who has gone away to university, but he likes his new teacher, Miss Chatto, and he is looking forward to the new project their class is working on with a local artist, called 'My Life in a Box'. When Ren gets back to school after the fire she has nothing left to put in her box and things start to disappear in Miss Chatto's class.

Ren and Caspar are complete opposites, Ren is angry and grieving for everything she has lost, but protective of her brother and worried about her parents. Caspar is kind and thoughtful but frustrates his teachers with his endless questions and curiosity. Ren's behaviour starts to come to light during a school project and we see both the impact of this upon herself but also her classmates. A few moments here were genuinely very moving and I think Cath Howe handles them well. She lets you see why Ren is doing what she's doing and that it's not necessarily something that makes her happy - this is in direct response to the trauma she's undergoing. The subject is handled sensitively and draws out the personalities of each of the main characters beautifully.

There's a lot to appreciate here. Cath Howe gives you so much in a very light and subtle way and deals with a complicated topic without assigning blame or sides. The slow friendship between Ren and Casper is delightful and gentle. It's a very genuine read from the first page to the last.

This is one of those reads that will stay with you for a long time.

## **Helen Byles**

### **The Not-So-Uniform Life of Holly-Mei**

**Christina Matula, illus. Yao Xiao, pub. Inkyard Press**

*The Not-So-Uniform Life of Holly-Mei* is Christina Matula's debut novel, the first in a fun and engaging trilogy, showcasing a diverse smorgasbord of mixed-Asian cultures.

When Holly-Mei's mum gets a promotion, Holly-Mei and her trendy younger sister, Millie, are uprooted from their home in Toronto, Canada and enrolled into Tai-Tam Prep, an elite private school in Hong Kong. Holly-Mei considers this a fresh start as she has fallen out with her best friend, Natalie and been ostracised by her hockey team mates. However, moving to Hong Kong brings many new challenges, these escalate now mum's new position as Chief Operating Officer for Asia-Pacific Lo Holdings International means Holly-Mei needs to make a good impression as she has an image to protect.

Holly-Mei does not get off to a good start in her new home - there is friction between her and her cousins, Rosie and Rhys - she has to cope with only video chats with her beloved confidant, Ah-Ma whose favourite saying is 'bitterness ends and sweetness begins' (a motto that encapsulates the ideals and message of the book) - and she has a run-in with Queen-bee Gemma on her first day at school, definitely the 'mean girl'. Gemma and Holly-Mei eventually become friends when a near-fatal accident during Gemma's birthday party becomes a bonding experience, and they realise they each have their own teenage problems. Ultimately Holly-Mei must learn to curb her habit of speaking without thinking.

Christina Matula's use of descriptive language is eloquent and evocative, with some especially expressive passages on the mouth-watering food. She creates a vivid picture of the community of high-achieving, high-powered families who want their children to be the best. I enjoyed reading about the rich-society lifestyle and I particularly liked the way Christina expertly highlighted how, when it comes to cultures and traditions each family is very different yet has similar expectations and strong family bonds.

Yao Xiao's detailed illustrations are scattered throughout the book giving it a traditional charm. At the beginning of the book is a functional map of Hong Kong, and I am partial to a map in fiction books. At

the back of the book is a useful Mandarin and Cantonese glossary, and pronunciation guide. Another great addition is two fun-to-try recipes: one for Ah-Ma's Dumplings, the other for Millie's Red Bean Creamsicles.

A celebration of the world's vast diversity that incorporates themes of honour, duty, and parental pressures.

**Anita Loughrey**

**Reviewer website:** [www.anitaloughrey.com](http://www.anitaloughrey.com)

## **Pizza Pete and the Perilous Potions**

**Carrie Sellon, illus. Sarah Horne, pub. Guppy Books**

I was so excited to have been chosen to review this book, I really enjoy reading books by debut authors especially when you find out the book is part of a trilogy. By the time I'd read the first chapter I had so many questions that needed answering, the most important of them was why Pete had decided never to leave his home again.

The first chapter was action packed and it set the scene for the story, giving us a lot of detailed information about Pete, the shop and his grandmother. We also found out that Pete's dad was on the verge of being evicted from his pizza shop. By the end of chapter 2 we've met Pete's best friend Anna and her dog Useless, the perfect sidekicks with a confidence that Pete lacks. The description of both these characters made me smile, especially because I share Anna's hair problems! Now began the madcap plan to save the pizza restaurant. Pete and Anna hatch a plan to add potions to the pizza's encouraging people to want to eat theirs. Of course, things don't go completely to plan and overusing the potions causes chaos...

If I could recommend only one chapter of this book it would be chapter 11 when Granny accidentally tries a piece of pizza with potion, the side effects are truly spectacular and hilarious. This book has a serious note to it too, it gently and sensitively deals with mental health issues and bullying.

In my school I have a book-mad year 2 group, this book will definitely be heading to their bookcase. This is exactly the sort of book these children are looking for, the layout and font are a perfect size, and the illustrations bring the story to life, the book is funny, and the storyline is ideal for maintain interest, it's a modern-day *George's Marvellous Medicine!*

This book is an excellent debut, and I'm looking forward to reading the next.

**Helen Byles**

## **The Princess in Black and the Prince in Pink**

**Shannon Hale and Dean Hale, illus. LeUyen Pham, pub. Walker Books**

This book, in soft pink and black illustrations reminds of those *Zorro + Three Musketeers* sort of tales which filled our childhood with dreams of heroism. *The Princess in Black and the Prince in Pink* by husband-and-wife team Shannon Hale and Dean Hale, and illustrator LeUyen Pham is a modern fairytale full of inclusivity and multidimensionality in princesses and princes, in place of the age-old narratives about the same.

It's a sweet bedtime read which both adults and kids will enjoy participating in! We enter the story with Princess Magnolia on her horse Frimplepants, heading to princess Snapdragon's castle for the annual flower festival. The surroundings are alive with the paraphernalia of festivities, people are enjoying rides on the Rosemary-go-round and Solar Coaster; they are decorating, selling, eating and merrymaking, and Princess Magnolia's friends - Princesses Apple Blossom, Honey Suckle, Hyacinth, Bluebell and others are busy managing the different attractions of the fair, when, all of a sudden someone screams...

What follows is a beautiful and hilarious fairy tale of friendship, bravery, unity, secret identities, and group of heroes who fight the bad guys and save the Flower festival with the Prince in Pink! The book is so full of fun and frolic that readers will crave more such tales of the adventures of the Princess in Black!

The soft, expressive illustrations along with the writers' narration makes this an amazing read - during travels or as a bedtime read and it's available as part of a bestselling series. I highly recommend finding out how the princess saves the day with her friends again on many new adventures!

**Ishika Tiwari**

## **Skulduggery Pleasant: Hell Breaks Loose**

**Derek Landy, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books**

This prequel to the *Skulduggery Pleasant* series is set in Italy in 1703, 300 years earlier and it tells the story of the Dead Men who must save the Lord of the Dark Sorcerers so that he can heal a rift between this world and Hell.

Full of action, in this book Hell does literally break loose!

This was our first read of this ever-popular series. Funny in places, dark and mysterious in others, we loved the medieval setting of Saint Gimignano in Tuscany and the cast of unconventional characters – Skulduggery himself, Ghastly, Shudder, Ravel, Saracen, Dexter and Hopeless. Punchy dialogue is interwoven through the prose, which is swift and gripping.

*Skulduggery Pleasant: Hell Breaks Loose* provides a fascinating backstory to the main character of the whole series, Skulduggery. In this novel he has the opportunity to take revenge on his arch nemesis Nefarian Serpine, the man who murdered him and killed his family thirteen years earlier. Set on the threshold between the mortal and magical world, and featuring curses, shadows, sorcery, skeletons, battles, and the Gates of Hell, this novel is a great read for fans of fantasy, magic, and adventure. And of course, for fans of the series!

**Steph Robertson**

## **The Thief of Farrowfell**

**Ravena Guron, pub. Faber Children's Books**

The Rippons are a family of magic-stealing, criminal masterminds and, though twelve-year-old Jude has been raised to live up to the Rippon family name, as the youngest, she is never taken seriously by her family and is often left to simply keep watch. Determined to prove herself, we meet Jude in the Weston Mansion, where she has used stolen ghost magic, which incidentally tastes of feet, to try and steal the rare magic held there.

Unfortunately, Jude's plan fails and as alarms sound, Jude heads to the Westons' port - a magical gateway which could help her to escape. Here, confronted by a magic-keeper, Jude learns that her stolen prize was protected by a curse which will affect the whole Rippon family and their business. As Jude attempts to untangle the mess she has made, she begins to discover dark secrets about her family and just how far they will go to stay at the top of their criminal world.

The world of Farrowfell is wholly believable, where magic, either raw and dangerous or tamed and edible, is the hottest commodity. Jude is a refreshing protagonist, the likes of which are sometimes hard to find, and her sheer determination to prove herself within her criminal family alongside her drive to do whatever it takes to put right the mess she has made, make the twists and turns of this plot both hilarious and heart-breaking at the same time. Jude reminded me subtly of that incredible character Mildred Hubble (a childhood favourite of mine) and I found her to be totally perfect in her imperfections.

The book tackles some difficult themes, for example Jude's family are somewhat neglectful and far from the loving family she deserves, and the theme of addiction is touched upon using raw magic. However, these are handled in a careful and sensitive way, wholly appropriate for the age group.

*The Thief of Farrowfell* is a refreshing page turner and I can't tell you how delighted I was to learn that this is just the first in a series.

### **Tracey Corner**

# Young Adult Books

## **A Calamity of Mannerings**

**Joanna Nadin, pub. UCLan Publishing**

Panther, Aster and Marigold Mannerings are the three sisters of Radley Manor: together they create a household of considerable chaos.

Marigold, the youngest, is highly knowledgeable about the world of animals, biology, and farming. Her scattered troupe of rabbits and hens are to be found in various places around the house - not forgetting Siegfried the sheep, who lives in the Scullery during bouts of the coldest weather. Marigold is often at odds with her more serious - and sometimes spiky - sister, Aster, who loves art and dramatic, angst-driven, cello playing. It is Panther who is dedicated to recording her life, and who begins the very diary we are reading. It is written, she says, in crimson ink: befitting a household on the brink of destruction.

The sisters have recently lost their father, and this grief is accompanied by a rush of uncertainty: without a male heir to the Mannerings name, they cannot remain in the home they have loved. Its oak-trees and attic rooms go to Cousin Valentine, and the siblings must find a way to adjust to the new life that lurks before them. As they move to share a home with their rather cantankerous Grandmother, Panther begins to receive letters from her childhood best friend, Freddy. She holds a flickering hope that she may yet discover a future pathway of her own choosing, but this seems distant when their present is so far from her expectations. She must seek out a way to regain some control of her family's future - all while looking out for any vaguely suitable men that may appear.

The sisters are engaging characters, especially Marigold, and their personalities clash and weave with lots of humour. As their situation unfolds, readers are quickly drawn into the animated dynamic of the household, feeling each up and down among the clamour and chaos.

## **Jemima Breeds**

### **Bite Risk**

**S.J Wills, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books**

*Bite Risk* is the first in S J Wills' upper-middle grade horror series. The story of thirteen-year-old Sel who like all the young people in Tremorglade, has caring (or perhaps guarding is a better word) responsibilities at certain times of the month for the adults of the remote town. Because once a month, when the full moon rises, the parents turn into werewolves (or 'Rippers'). The children are

tasked with keeping themselves and everyone else safe. A role they take in their stride, as if it is as normal as having a shower.

This has been the children's normal for a long time, but strange goings-on in the town signal a change is coming. Not long after this, people begin to disappear as the Rippers begin to escape their confinement.

This book had me hooked from the beginning. As someone who loves all things *Stranger Things* and the horror genre, this was the perfect read for me and I'm sure many teenagers will devour this too. There were lots of twists and turns which kept me engaged and the characters were authentic and the story fantastic. I can't wait until the next in the series comes out!

**Pauline Bird**

## **Dance of Thieves**

**Mary E. Pearson, pub. Hodder & Stoughton**

This was a beautifully written book.

It tells the story of a boy called Jase who is heir to an ancient dynasty and a girl called Kazimyrrah (Kazi) who is a specially trained soldier, rescued from the streets where she used to scavenge and steal to survive. Jase and Kazi hate each other due to different priorities and situations but when they are chained together alone and forced to work together to survive, they form a mutual agreement and put their differences aside.

A majority of the book is filled with Kazi and Jase overcoming their differences and learning to enjoy each other's company. However, as Kazi's true mission remains her priority, the mutual friendship is torn apart and it is revealed that both characters betrayed each other, more focused on their loyalties to their own kingdoms and families.

This book was impossible to put down and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it as I felt like I was experiencing the story with the characters. I was instantly invested in the story and wish it never ended.

**Gemma Walford**

## **The Dos and Donuts of Love**

**Adiba Jaigardar, pub. Hodder Children's Books**



Love is so many things which means books about love can be so many things which is why *The Dos and Donuts of Love* is such a brilliant title. It draws you in, makes you wonder if this book will be a lesson in how we do make love a success and presumably with donuts. It does go something like that, but it is more too.

Imagine the scene. A chilly summer's day in Ireland, you are sitting in bed feeling very sorry for yourself, eating doughnuts, watching a baking show, talking to your best friend who is in Bangladesh for the summer and is complaining about the heat. Your email pings with a notification. It's the notification you have been waiting anxiously for. It's from the Junior Irish Baking Show...and you are in! This is absolutely the best news you could possibly have had and when day 1 comes around you couldn't be happier...until you are paired with your ex...

Shireen Malik is still reeling from her breakup with her girlfriend Chris when she learns she has a place on the baking show of her dreams. For Shireen the prize money will be nice, but it is the publicity she hopes it will bring her parents donut shop and the kudos it will give her for her application to baking school that really motivates her. Oh, and her love of baking. When she learns Chris is on the show too and begins to grow close to fellow contestant Niamh it seems that it is not just in the kitchen that things are heating up. Can they all learn to put feelings aside for the show, work together to uncover the potential saboteur, have their donuts and eat them?

A very sweet, witty, and refreshingly frank love story, a story about loving ourselves for who we are and accepting nothing less.

**Dawn Jonas**

## **Gwen and Art Are NOT In Love**

**Lex Croucher, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books**

If you thought that a romantic, witty, queer, medieval romance based on the age-old and ever-popular story of King Arthur would never find its way into print then I strongly suggest you change your mind for this most unlikely combination of story threads has made it there!

Lex Croucher is the author of this witty, dramatic, and queer medieval YA comedy drama that I guarantee you are, like me, going to fall head over heels for. Not only is it subversive but it is touching, heart-warming, brave, escapist, and brilliantly accessible. It stands out from the crowd because it is completely original, and it really is an utterly brilliant story. It is like nothing you have ever read before. I think it is safe to say that the main characters may not be in love with one another as the traditional stories we are intend them to be but that, by the end of the book, you will be in love with them. Oh, and they may have worked out who they are in love with!

Gwen is princess of England, a quick-witted and clever young girl. Arthur is a future Duke (and general gadabout, being the younger son). They have been betrothed since birth and they have never much liked each other – in fact this seems to be the only thing that they are able to agree on. However, they are about to become unlikely allies. When Gwen catches Art kissing a boy and he in turn finds her diary complete with entries about the kingdom's only female knight they decide to put aside their differences and their fights. Pretending to finally like one another, to protect each other, they struggle to keep up their ruse as their secret relationships get more serious. Then of course there is Gwen's bookish brother to account for...he is nothing if not a surprising character.

The path to true love has never been more crooked!

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **Her Good Side**

**Rebekah Weatherspoon, pub. Penguin Random House**

Despite popular opinion even confident and self-assured people, of any age, can have insecurities, some of them can be embarrassing too. This sums up Bethany Greene, one of the stars of Rebekah Weatherspoon's *Her Good Side*, a perfectly hilarious, incredibly beautiful and touching love story. It is a book full of friendship, fun, coming of age, understanding and of course love.

*Her Good Side* has a fantastically diverse range of characters from all walks of life blending seamlessly, showing us that no matter who we are, what our strengths and weaknesses, we will always have friends and families to support us, encourage us and be there to hear us when we need them. The friendship group that Bethany is part of is a strong one and there is no judgement among them, probably a rare situation but one that makes this book even more heart-warming and, added to this is the fact that they are all friends, if not close ones, with plenty of others outside their group setting a great example to readers.

Bethany is sixteen and she is a late bloomer. She is the only one in her group of friends who has never had a boyfriend, a date or even her first kiss. In fact, the idea often, to her great embarrassment, makes her cry. Determined to change that she asks her hunky crush and friend for a homecoming ball date, but he turns her down. On a mission she and her friends try a few other boys - no luck. After every back-up idea has fallen through she takes a chance on a fake date with her best friend's ex - platonic has to be better than nothing they agree.

But Jacob is also unsure of himself. Dumped twice in two months he now hides behind his camera which incidentally he is very good at doing and his resulting photos and images are outstanding. Bethany and Jacob decide to fake date, so they can both practice for the real thing, which they are

certain will be with others. There is research to be done ready for their real dates but when the time comes will they realize their perfect date was right in front of them all this time?

A truly wonderful story that had me grinning like a Cheshire cat for much of it. I saw my teen self in the story and I am sure many other readers will too, it is a beautiful and funny coming of age book.

**May Jonas**

## **How Far We've Come**

**Joyce Efia Harmer, illus. Natasha Mackenzie, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books**

*How Far We've Come* is a compelling Young Adult novel from Joyce Efia Harmer, that explores the legacy of slavery and the challenge of racial inequality. Similar to Octavia E. Butler's widely popular 1979 novel *Kindred*, Harmer's debut novel is a story about friendship and hope for the future, and incorporates time travel as Obah - enslaved on a Barbados plantation in 1834 - meets the otherworldly Jacob and is transported into the future, to a present day Somerset.

Narrated in the first person, the reader sees Obah's experiences through her eyes - what life was really like for her as a slave in 1834, and how her views change as she experiences life in the twenty-first century. Although her early narration makes it clear that English is not her native language, her vocabulary later improves as she becomes more anglicised. In a way, language itself becomes a character of the novel, and reflects Obah's personality. As her language develops, so does she as a person. This later culminates in her teaching Murreat (back in Barbados) how to write, and how written words have power: "Shapes of black and white that decide fate. Words can hold secrets. Words can give life."

However, it is difficult to read a book about slavery, and the legacy of racial inequality, without it dividing opinion. For some young readers, the story will be a true eye-opener to the atrocities of our ancestors; for others, the apparent 'white guilt' of the modern-day characters makes them seem feeble-minded. Nevertheless, Harmer has done wonders to bring life to the characters of both Barbados of 1834, and modern-day Somerset. Obah is an engaging character and a strong protagonist, and Jacob is a kind and compassionate soul. Although the love story between them never really rings true, it's clear that Jacob is eager to help the strong, determined, and resilient Obah to find her way in the world.

*How Far We've Come* is a fantastic debut novel from Harmer, with a thought-provoking narrative that will drive discussion. Although some readers may find the language and themes upsetting, Harmer's novel is sensitive in its approach as it explores the difficult topics of slavery, racism, and inequality.

**Chris J Kenworthy**

## **Just Like Everyone Else**

**Sarah Hagger-Holt, pub. Usborne**

Without a doubt, this is one of the best books I've read for some time. It deserves a place in every secondary school library (if they still have books, as the 'library' now frequently misuses its title and has become a computer room), and Year 6 pupils would find it an equally good read.

Our hero, thirteen-year-old Aidan, is the only boy in a large family of noisy younger sisters. Unlike them, and unlike his touchy-feely parents, he is the quiet member of the family, and he finds peace and enjoyment in fell running. He is aiming at winning the Under 14's Cup, and his persistence in his running throughout his own uncertainties and the changes in family life is key to his eventual realisation that he can cope. Aidan has had a best friend, Jack, since he was a small child, but now they are teenagers, Aidan is concerned that being friends with Jack, who's small and slight and loves poetry and performing in plays, might make others assume that Jack is gay. This leads to Aidan worrying that he himself is gay. When his mother chooses to become a surrogate mother to help Justin and Arif, who have made a gay marriage and hope to have a family, Aidan becomes even more confused and worried about himself. Important, concerning, often confusing as this might be for readers, Sarah Hagger-Holt has achieved a novel which perfectly portrays the uncertainty Aidan now feels.

The resolution will ultimately help reassure readers that whatever teenage fears they may have about their own sexuality, about relationships, friendships and families, there is a way to come to terms with who they really are. Aidan tells his own story, and we see his family and friends, and the new friends and family members Justin and Arif, travel through their new situations from uncertainty and, in Aidan's case, despair and anger.

Like Aidan, we should all discover that, 'I can be what I want to be, whoever that is. I don't have to try to be the same as everyone else. And neither does anyone else'.

**Bridget Carrington**

## **The Lesbiana's Guide to Catholic School**

**Sonora Reyes, pub. Faber Children's Books**

As we might expect from a Faber publication, I can't do better than start with part of the back blurb of this novel: 'Sixteen-year-old Yamilet Flores prefers to be known for her killer eyeliner, not for being one of the only Mexican kids at her new, mostly white, very rich Catholic school. But at least no one

knows she's gay, and Yami intends to keep it that way... The thing is, it's hard to be straight when Bo, the only openly queer girl at school, is so annoyingly perfect.'

Yami is therefore determined to present herself as a straight girl, having been outed by her supposedly best friend at her previous school. Quite apart from that concern, she is at a disadvantage at her new school being a child of hard-up immigrants from Mexico. Her father has had his immigration permit rescinded and is no longer to cross the border to meet with the rest of his family. As a result, Yami, her older brother Cesar, and her mother struggle to make ends meet, let alone to compete with the well-heeled neighbours and school attendees.

Yami is very proud of her heritage, and reading (and greatly enjoying), this novel we learn a lot about Mexican culture, and about the Hispanophobia throughout the US in general, and particularly in the southern states. Published initially in the US, unsurprisingly the book has many references to and in Mexican Spanish. Regrettably there is no glossary provided, and so a lot of reading time is spent researching crucial words and phrases which are expressed in Mexican Spanish. Nevertheless, we can all relate to Yami's very determined, funny, and often heart-wrenching teenage life. She is proudly gay but terrified to reveal it, to her parents as well as fellow students, for fear of hatred and ridicule. At the end of the book, we face a major crisis in Cesar's life and also see the sometimes-surprising reaction of people when at least Yami feels able to reveal her 'secret'.

The book is a great read for many reasons, and Yami herself is a great, honest, character.

## **Bridget Carrington**

### **Lose You To Find Me**

Erik J Brown, pub. Hodder Children's Books

This is a heart-warming and emotional story aimed at young adults. It is a very positive story, with a great mix of young meeting old. It is full of amazing and lovable characters and looks at the struggles they go through whilst trying to cope with what life throws at them. The book also features a gay love triangle and lots of coming-of-age warmth.

The story is very much about the characters and is not just another tale of young adult love. The younger characters interact wonderfully with the many older people who feature. It is a fun and easy to read book, with many short and easily manageable chapters.

The two main characters, Tommy and Gabe, first met at a summer camp when they were just ten years old. Their short-lived relationship comes to an abrupt end when this summer meeting finishes. Years later, the two cross paths again at a retirement home. Tommy is an aspiring chef at the Sunset Estates Retirement Community. His ambition is to apply to attend one of the best culinary schools in

the world and to do this he needs the experience and the recommendation of his manager at the home. Gabe turns up at this retirement home but gives the impression that he has completely forgotten about Tommy. The story line is now will they get a second chance at young love? Does the fact that they are two boys complicate this relationship? Will Tommy be able to overcome his anxieties and will another character in the relationship complicate matters?

On the surface, this story has a simple plot line, but some serious issues and complications are dealt with and yet the book remains an enjoyable and very easy read.

**Gary Kenworthy**

## **Lying in the Deep**

**Diana Urban, pub. Penguin Random House (Razorbill)**

If ever a title suited a novel this one does! Page after page there's a multitude of lies, and blood galore, all of which will undoubtedly engage those mid to late teenagers who particularly enjoy gory stories, and books with a very North American background!

In her third YA novel US writer Diana Urban promises readers that her book is 'A juicy thriller of jealousy, love, and betrayal set on a Semester at Sea-inspired cruise ship, with a diverse cast of delightfully suspicious characters who'll leave you guessing with every jaw-dropping twist', and she's not wrong.

When the prologue of a novel starts with 'I didn't realize there's be so much blood' readers must be prepared for plenty of it to splash through the four-hundredish pages, with teenage characters being eliminated at quite some rate! The action takes place on board a large cruise ship which takes US college students on CoB – Campus on Board, with, not unexpectedly, plenty of really rich students on board. Our storyteller Jade, however, unlike many of her friends, has had to scrape the cost together, and is cramped into a tiny mid-deck room with two other students. Her best friend has just ditched her, as has her boyfriend, and horror of horrors, they turn up on the ship, so she just can't forget the agony of losing both best friend and boyfriend.

Urban creates a suitably claustrophobic atmosphere within the ship, and bodies fall and blood flows with great enthusiasm! Nevertheless, as the book progresses (initially rather slowly), a number of thoughtful instances of teenage and familial issues arise, which to some extent explain the characters' need to lie, and in some cases to murder because of their paranoia. This is an entertaining novel for those who like its genre, with thought-provoking teenage concerns and experiences. Unfortunately, my hardback US-released copy bore a number of missing words and other errors, so one hopes that the paperback version, which has just appeared in the UK, has been proofread more carefully. I somehow feel that the gaming world might greatly enjoy this novel!

**Bridget Carrington**

## **The Sharp Edge of Silence**

**Cameron Kelly Rosenblum, pub. Hot Key Books**

This is a thriller focusing on rape culture and masculinity amongst the students at an expensive and elite American boarding school. Those who attend the Lycroft Phelps School are very privileged, apart from a few scholarship students.

There is a warning that this book contains descriptions of sexual violence, and it tackles issues that some readers will find disturbing. Nevertheless, it is a thought-provoking book, and its content and issues will make the reader think. The subjects of rape and mental health are not always easy to write and read about, but these issues are tackled well by this author. The story is sensitively written around these important and emotional topics.

Throughout the book, each chapter focuses on one of the three main and very different characters. Each of these characters is very strong. Charlotte is a bright 'A' grade student and girlfriend of the school's star rower. She very much believes in what the school stands for. Max is a scholarship student who is struggling. He is asked to join the rowing team to help increase his popularity. Quinn has to watch the boy who assaulted her as he continues to be popular amongst the other students. These three very different characters narrate throughout the book. Different chapters focus on different points of view from each character.

The plot centres on Quinn and the aftermath of her being in school with the boy who assaulted her. In parts it is brutal and horrible. In a school that boasts about its rowing team, there are disturbing things in the background and teachers who seem to turn a blind eye. There are many confident boys who the girls want to be with and there are boys who think that they can treat the girls however they like.

In summary, this is a book of strong characters, with some upsetting scenes, but a book which tackles some important issues which need to be brought out into the open.

**Gary Kenworthy**

## **Teen Titans: Robin**

**Kami Garcia and Gabriel Picolo, pub. DC Comics**

Damian Wayne and Max Navarro are on the run having broken Raven Roth and Garfield Logan out of a secret H.I.V.E facility, Nashville Tennessee. H.I.V.E wants them back and Slade Wilson is the man to do it.

Teen Titans are a group of young superheroes, beginning to learn how to control their powers: Raven's magical abilities which have just released her demon father Trigon into the world; Garfield's animal transformation skills; Max's summoning of spirits; Damian's physical and intellectual prowess, but aggressive nature, and when Damian's brother finds them, Dick Grayson. These titans seem vulnerable, barely able to use their powers and when they do, it is exhaustive. Coached by Max's mother Natalia and foster-parent-to-be of Raven, and encouraging one another, despite their failures, slowly their powers grow and so too do the relationships.

This is however Robin's story, alias of Dick, foster child of Bruce Wayne, the Boy Wonder himself and first Robin, and Damian, Bruce Wayne's biological son who later becomes the fifth Robin. Dick and Damian have some family issues to resolve first. They strike a deal to see if Dick is to remain, pitting themselves against each other in a number of tests of physical fitness, fighting skills and mental agility. There are plenty of opportunities for incredible graphic novel techniques, as our superheroes leap out of frames, cut quickly between scenes and rapid changes of shot and of course some very satisfying sound effects. The use of thought balloons is particularly effective as Damian tries to manage his feelings and what the other titans will think of him. Now having grown in power and ability, sibling rivalry sorted, the team is ready. Avoid capture by H.I.V.E and more importantly stop Raven's father Trigon.

Teen Titans is the newest incarnation of young superheroes and a separate spin-off in the DC world. *Teen Titans: Robin* is book four in the series, the first three introducing the back stories of Raven Roth and Garfield Logan and awaiting to introduce Starfire in book five.

A satisfying story with an emotional depth about a group of teenagers discovering who they are.

**Simon Barrett**

## **The Thing About Lemons**

**Tasha Harrison, pub. UCLan Publishing**

Get ready for more teen drama than you can shake a lemon tree at.

*The Thing About Lemons* starts with Ori making the biggest mistake of her life and kissing her best friend's boyfriend, something that isn't improved by said best friend walking in on them. Ori had been planning on spending the summer with her friends, camping in Cornwall, but after the kissing



incident she isn't welcome. In fact, only one of her friends, Ravi, is even talking to her - and he has got a lot less chatty since he met a girl at prom. So, yeah, things aren't going great in Ori's world.

Unfortunately for her, our leading lady can't just hibernate in front of the TV until the drama all blows over because, knowing she'd be in Cornwall, her mum has rented out their flat for the summer. Cue Ori being sent off to France to spend the school holidays with her estranged granddad, a man who feels that need to fill every spare moment with chitter chatter - mostly about his prized new electric car. So, in one fell swoop Ori has gone from spending an epic holiday with her friends to being shackled up with a boomer and his aging companions- not to mention that fact he has roped her into a working holiday. But, despite all the odds against her, things turn out better than planned.

This is the most fun I have had reading in quite some time, it took me back to those days of teen angst, heart-breaking crushes, and fashion choices that are best forgotten.

*The Thing About Lemons* would be the perfect summer read for any teen reader who is just looking for a good laugh, whether they enjoy getting into drama or just reading about it.

**Rosie Cammish Jones**

# Non-Fiction Books

## **Can You Get Rainbows in Space? A Colourful Compendium of Space and Science**

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

If you are expecting this book to be an encyclopedia format of scientific facts, you are going to be disappointed because *Can You Get Rainbows in Space?* is a glorious exploration of science through the medium of colour beginning with the intriguing title and contents list where each chapter is denoted by a colour; right from the start, this book grabs the reader's attention and is a rather unusual way of presenting information.

The introduction explains what colour is and how we see it, and each chapter then explores various aspects of a colour. Red, for example, looks at why blood is red, why Mars is known as the red planet, why some monkeys have red bottoms and why the sweat of hippos is red! With orange, we discover where the original orange came from, look at fire and flames, learn why carrots are orange and why leaves turn orange in autumn. We are treated to similar explorations of yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. The book is full of fascinating facts – did you know that humans can see more shades of green than any other colours? Or that peacock feathers are actually brown, and it is light waves bouncing around on the grooves and bumps of the feathers that create the different colours we see?

The penultimate chapter, *Beyond the Rainbow*, looks at the rest of the electromagnetic spectrum – the bits that are invisible to the human eye - whilst the last chapter explores rainbows and whether you can actually find them in space. The pages are extremely colourful and filled with illustrations, and information is in small bite-sized paragraphs making it the perfect book to dip in to. I would have liked an index for even more accessibility, but I think any 8 – 10-year-old would enjoy reading this although be prepared for a constant stream of “did you know that”!

**Barbara Band**

## **Chews Your Own Tasty Adventure**

**Dr Sai Pathmanathan, illus. Lucia Vinti, pub. Faber Children's Books**

Go into any bookshop and head over to the cookery section - its huge, ever the cooking and baking books for children section will be bulging with titles but none of them, I think I can safely guarantee, are going to be anything like this one.

When we think of cookery and baking books we think of recipes, instructions of how to bake and make, and a few pictures of what the finished product should hopefully look like. When we open *Chews Your Own Tasty Adventure* we find, yes, recipes, pictures, instructions but we also find an unfolding adventure.

This book presents us with an interactive game. Whether our first choice of recipe is cupcakes, churros, paratha or pride the aim of this book is to encourage its reader to chews an ingredient before choosing the recipe. If you have, for example, chosen carrots it is to page 28 you must go. What will you find? A recipe for Carrot Cake and a bonus recipe for cinnamon icing - yum. Left over curry takes you to the Samosa's of page 34 and if you are feeling very curious why not follow condensed milk to page 37 for some South Asian Roti bread?

Wine every recipe containing a maximum of six key ingredients they are all simple to make and have very clear instructions too - older children could easily follow many of the recipes with some supervision but little intervention from adults. There are tips, facts, and plenty of opportunities for experimentation with both ingredients and techniques. This is a brilliant combination of cookbook and game book, it is unique, uniquely clever and a challenge waiting to be embraced.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **Earth's Incredible Places: The Great Barrier Reef**

**Helen Scales, illus. Lisk Feng, pub. Flying Eye Books**

The Great Barrier Reef is a beautifully illustrated exploration of one of the world's natural wonders and a World Heritage Site, full of fascinating facts about the rich and diverse species of plant and animal life living on it, and sadly the threats to the reef's continued existence.

Interestingly the book examines the longer natural and human history of the Great Barrier Reef, beginning at the end of the last Ice Age about 10,000 years ago, with Aborigine and Torres Strait islanders harvesting and hunting animals, recorded in stories of The Dreamtime and rock art. Europeans literally made contact with the reef when Captain James Cook's ship *HMS Endeavour* crashed into it in June 1770! In more recent times human activity has been even more damaging, but there is also hope as people try to save it.

The book mainly focuses on the sea life, the plants and animals dwelling on or living around the reef from sharks and whales, to shoals of fish, animals that look like plants for example the parrotfish, molluscs (and I did not know octopuses are molluscs), crustaceans and enormous saltwater crocodiles. Helen Scales writes clear, succinct descriptions of each species and their behaviour, identifying facts that will appeal to young readers, capturing their curiosity and imagination. Lisk Feng's illustrations present the general environment of the reef with individual drawings of varieties

of certain species for example the different species of turtles, as well as microscopic details of some molluscs.

At the back of the book there is a useful glossary and Key Stage 2 teacher's notes and ideas produced by SHAPES for schools, an educational agency. These notes consist of interesting questions, asking readers to use information from the book to answer increasingly challenging questions, some of which require a more imaginative response as well as activities. Worksheets can be downloaded.

*Earth's Incredible Places: The Great Barrier Reef* is a comprehensive guide to these beautiful and fascinating underwater worlds, allowing young readers to understand its importance and be inspired.

Other books in the *Earth's Incredible Places* series include *Amazon River*, *Everest* and *Yellowstone*.

## **Simon Barrett**

### **How To Be A Kid Boss**

**Larry Hayes, illus. Joëlle Dreidemy, pub. Walker Books**

101 practical life lessons for being epic, a legend, a Boss. Presented in the comedy-factual colloquial cartoon-strewn manner pioneered by *Horrible Histories*, the lessons range from 'How to pick your nose without anyone noticing' to 'How to find buried treasure', 'How to understand a dog' to 'How to talk so grown-ups will listen', 'How to blame your fart on someone else' to 'How to be happy'.

The lessons are not entirely uncomplimentary. This is the most universally appealing book I've seen in a long time. It's part bluffer's guide, part encyclopaedia, and utterly random except that every entry is in some way cool ('How to escape from a king cobra'), and many are amusingly manipulative ('How to make somebody dribble').

The text is dense with information but light and full of scoundrel personality; the illustrations are characterful and funny. The book's super-accessible and dip-into-able, and no one entry outstays its welcome; some lessons are trivially skimpy, but even then, their brevity feels like it's the point ('How to survive an asteroid crash' – you don't) and does make space for other lessons to get the deep treatment they deserve ('How to train a monkey').

The lesson template is simple and empirical: 'everybody knows' (the accepted truth), 'but the secret is this' (the new information, some of which is deep and QI-worthy – the world's smallest language has 137 words), then 'put it to the test' (proofs of the puddings, many of which are doable at home). I very much like that: it's so encouraging of active thinking.

Simply, this is my new rucksack book. Perfect for filling in 5- and 10-minute gaps waiting in queues, and an excellent launchpad for discussions, arguments, curiosity, speculation, and shenanigans.

**Dmytro Bojaniwskyj**

## **How to Build a Racing Car**

**Fran Scott, illus. Paul Boston, pub. Walker Books**

Here's a book that will not remain idle on a library shelf or classroom book corner, and that will keep readers highly entertained, whether they are spurred to embrace the engineering challenge or prefer to learn about the theory supporting it.

The aim is to build a racing car using objects and material easily found at home (cardboard, a plastic bottle, a pencil, for example). The book offers a step-by-step explanation that often embraces opportunities to introduce elements of physics, chemistry, and biology, making this book a perfect resource for STEM activities.

The language includes plenty of relevant terminology but remains simple and clear overall. The illustrations are detailed, and the pages are well structured with colour coded boxes. In each phase of the construction readers are shown what problems could be encountered and how to solve them if they appear. Little 'did you know' sections include further information about aspects of the racing experience. A list of materials and warnings when help from an adult is necessary complete each chapter. A section with templates to personalise the car and the start gate are a fun addition.

**Laura Brill**

## **I Can See Nature's Rainbow**

**Vicky Woodgate, pub. Scholastic Children's Books**

Don't you love Scholastic books? I certainly do. Since those early years in school when we used to receive a catalogue of scholastic books to choose from and read the myriad tales of myth, magic, puzzles, trivia, and science.

Here is one more for you- a beautiful combination of new words, names, creatures of the earth, a sprinkle of science and lots of colours, *I Can See Nature's Rainbow* by commercial artist and author Vicky Woodgate. With her 25 years of experience as an artist she fills this 31-page infotainment book creating a display of nature's artistry in turn.

An artist's vision is unique and that's what we see as readers when we enter the world of nature's magic through pages dedicated to single colours. The book begins with blue - that deep beautiful soft shade, which is there in the sky, of the whale, of the ocean as we know, but did you know that there's a blue daisy and a blue iguana and a blue Golden Snub-Nosed Monkey too? Wait for more because as we enter the colour green in nature's world, we get to know about green sloths, green Lynx Spider, Green Catbird and not only who is green but their special features too, I bet you didn't know the green Kakapo parrot is the world's heaviest parrot, it weighs as much as a brick!

Surprised or not, you will go on to meet more such astonishing creatures, plants, animals and even crystals with interesting facts. This book is an interesting read for adults and a must in a child's library, good for ages 7 and above, not only to learn the facts, but also to experience the beauty, colours and variety of this world they inhabit in which a rainbow will cease to be a rare phenomenon once they learn to form their own rainbows with colours curated by them, as a gift from mother nature!

**Ishika Tiwari**

## **Little Green Fingers: Easy Peasy Gardening Activities**

**Claire Phillip, illus. Aitch, trans. Laure Afchain, pub. Little Gestalten**

This book is ideal for encouraging children to connect with nature and learn about the natural world such as the seasons in the garden and how they impact on plants and animals.

It is jam-packed with twenty wonderful and creative gardening activities and crafts using natural materials readily found around us, and the suggestions are simple and easy to do whether you have a garden, balcony or even just a windowsill. There are step-by-step guides for art projects such as constructing garden wind chimes, making flower and leaf crowns, painting a rock village, or putting together a variety of bird feeders; I've got a bowl of pinecones I was wondering what to do with – now I know!

The gardening activities such as growing potatoes in a bag, using egg cartons for animal cress heads and regrowing from scraps are inspiring and will encourage children to learn about how plants grow as well as generating a sense of wellbeing and self-confidence. Using natural materials also means the activities are environmentally friendly – another bonus. The book is richly illustrated in natural muted soft hues perfectly in keeping with the theme, printed on cream coloured paper and aimed at 6 – 10 years. However, it could be used with supervision by younger children and the detailed and clear instructions mean that older children will require minimal direction.

In a world dominated by screens and where so many activities require the purchase of expensive materials, this book is the perfect antidote.

**Barbara Band**

## **Mama Mammals: Reproduction and Birth in Mammals**

**Cathy Evans, illus. Bia Melo, pub. Cicada Books**

This stunningly presented science book explains the facts of life by looking at reproduction and birth in various mammal species.

It describes what mammals are and the ways some of them mate, such as male hippos who fart loudly and spread poo around. Fertilisation in humans is covered as are multiple fertilisations such as twins and litters, and readers learn about unusual mammals such as marsupials whose foetuses are not nourished by a placenta and how animals have varying lengths of gestation. Baby animal names, different ways of feeding and the growth of new-borns are explored. The book concludes with a look at raising babies, explaining how mammals rely on their mother's milk so spend time with them – did you know orca calves don't sleep for the first month of their lives so neither do their mum - and the variety of mammalian family life.

The final pages celebrate the uniqueness of human families. The pages are sturdy with charming illustrations and text is presented in short accessible chunks. Although aimed at 5 – 7 years, this is a book that could be shared with and enjoyed by younger children.

**Barbara Band**

## **Mona Lisa and the Others**

**Alice Harman, illus. Quentin Blake, pub. Thames & Hudson**

In case you, or the children reading this review, intrigued by this book, have not heard of it The Louvre is a national art museum in Paris, France and it is home to some of the most canonical works of Western Art. This book, *Mona Lisa and the Others*, is a humours walk-through the Louvre and an opportunity to meet 30 iconic works of art, each of them introducing and talking about themselves. It's genius. It's a fantastic, accessible introduction to art.

Meet Mona Lisa, she is probably one of the most famous paintings in the world, but she knows she is not the only one in The Louvre that you would like to see. She introduces herself and then lets others tell their story too. She also assures us, before we start, that it is okay not to like them all, it is important, with art, to enjoy it. Venus de Milo we learn has been in the Louvre for only 200 years of her very long life after she was found in a hole, buried by ancient Greek ruins. She is stunning but maybe you prefer some bling and would like to gaze at the sceptre of Charles V a solid gold piece

studded with jewels. There are some ancient Egyptian remains which are really old and have their own stories to tell, one a princess who has a feast for eternity and the other a writer. All these live among paintings and other sculptures celebrating human and animal life, famous moments in time and people too.

As each fascinating story unfolds, we find our curiosity piqued. Drawn in by the images of these works of art and Quentin Blake's brilliant cartoon-esque illustrations accompanying them and giving us a new interpretation. There are facts about each work of art to learn and accompanying history too including the story of The Louvre, some suggestions for thinking about art, a timeline and a glossary. This book has everything, now it just needs you to pick it up and take a journey through some of the history of art.

**Colin Paterson**

## **Rivers**

**Simon Chapman, illus. Qu Lan, pub. Templar Publishing**

At least 70% of the earth is water and most of that is in the oceans, but there is a small percentage which is in rivers, it may surprise you to know it is a small amount because rivers seem so plentiful and sometimes incredibly long. Remember how big the earth is though when having these thoughts. Perhaps more than the ocean the river as a source of water is vital for humans and homes have always been set up near these sources of water Simon Chapman, author of *Rivers* tells us. His facts, and stories, are accompanied by stunningly lifelike illustrations by Qu Lan and make this book almost unputdownable.

From its very source we can follow the life and journey of the river all the way to the sea, its end. Along the way we learn all about the water cycle, the importance of water, in all its forms, to the earth and the many variations of rivers - springs, streams, waterfalls - that can be found all around us if we know where to look. Not sure where to look, you will when you have finished this book for finish it you will. It will spark a curiosity in every reader, a yearning to look, to see, to know more. You will discover rivers through the ages, rivers around the world, rivers used for pleasure and rivers used for work. There is also the wildlife of the river to consider and stop to see.

Rivers have quite literally shaped our world and we have had some role in shaping them. Discover them all.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **Stone Age Beasts**



**Ben Lerwill, illus. Grahame Baker-Smith, pub. Walker Books**

How brave do you feel today? Brave enough to pick up a book full of beasts, but not just any beasts, I must make that clear. Ben Lerwill's book contains 18 beasts all of which lived on this earth, in the Stone Age! Yes, this book contains real beasts, they may all now be extinct, but they are quite a sight to behold and fascinating too. Read all about them, from the pictures that Ben Lerwill paints with his words to the fact files full of science and more. See them too in the illustrations provided by Grahame Baker-Smith, looking as real and lifelike as is possible.

The Stone Age is a key component of the curriculum for young children at primary school and as such any books that can be found which cover the subject area are popular. This one will be popular not just for school but for home too, so fascinating is its content. After all it is not every day that we are able to come face-to face with Stone Age beasts in all their glory with facts galore added in. Some of these beasts are giants, some look like animals we see today. My husband was fascinated by the Siberian Unicorn who I have to say I think I have a soft spot for too with its gorgeous long fur and appetite for grass I like to think I might have been a softie! But these beasts were big, some look to have been very scary and they are all awesome. I think this book will have us all fascinated for a long time to come.

**Colin Paterson**

**The Who, What, Why of Zoology**

**Jules Howard, illus. Lucy Letherland, pub. Wide Eyed Editions**

*The Who, What, Why of Zoology* is an amazing introduction to the many animals living across the diverse ecosystems of Planet Earth, from the hot, humid tropical rainforests to the cold tundra and even below the sea.

The book is perfectly titled with a series of double page spreads, each exploring a different ecosystem, examining WHO lives there, WHAT zoologists have discovered and WHY this science is important.

The WHO and WHAT chapters consist of a full colour spread with illustrations: they are full of the different animals and humans conducting experiments -- alongside some humorous additions for readers to spot -- accompanied by relevant textboxes of information, allowing readers to be drawn to different parts of the page and find out more information. Cool facts include sloths pooh once a week in tropical forests and that not all turtles have hard shells. Although I wouldn't be too keen on counting caimans by the torchlight reflected in their eyes!

The WHY chapters use a mixture of text and illustrations, asking fundamental questions about how many species there are, the abilities and capabilities of different animals and, how animals adapt to

different environments and even over time. There are also more utilitarian questions as to how this knowledge can benefit humans, such as advances in medicine and material science. It is intriguing to learn how zoologists are finding new species and how these are being named. In 2021 the synapturanus zombie frog was so named as the scientists dug through the soil with their hands like zombies.

Readers too can become a zoologist with a helpful guide on how to explore the animal world around you.

*The Who, What and Why of Zoology* offers some great science, introducing the fascinating world of animals and also its many mysteries that we are still seeking to understand.

**Simon Barrett**

## **You Are a Story**

**Laura Dockrill, pub. Hot Key Books**

The biggest selling point of this book is that it encourages young people to write their story and speak their truth.

This 'how to' book walks would-be writers through a series of chapters and pieces of advice on getting started, being your own critic and being bold enough to share your work. Settled amongst each chapter are exercises for writers, some simple and others challenging but all designed to make you think more and be open to new ideas. These will in turn make you a better writer.

Schools promote a healthy reading for pleasure culture, but it is only recently that the same dedication is being given to writing for pleasure. This would be a brilliant book to gift to a young writer as Laura Dockrill shares personal experiences throughout the book, encouraging resilience and perseverance during the phases of writing.

There is a strong sense of identity and well-being shared through this book. Actively encouraging the sharing of experiences, stories, and truths, this promotes self-love, self-respect, and a true sense of identity. This is key to surviving those teenage years! Grab a new notebook, make a mess on the first page, and get writing.

**Erin Hamilton**

## **Picture books**

### **Afterward Everything Was Different**

Rafael Yockteng, illus. Jairo Buitrago, trans.  
Elisa Amado

### **Watch Out! There's a Monster Coming!**

Karl Newson, illus. Zehra Hicks

### **Bravo Avocado**

Chana Stiefel, illus. Anna Süßbauer

### **The Chalk Garden**

Sally Anne Garland

### **Holey Moley**

Bethan Clarke, illus. Anders Frang

### **I'm Not Scared**

Brita Teckentrup

### **Ingenious Edie**

Patrick Corrigan

### **Into The Wild**

Thomas Docherty

### **The Mermaid Moon**

Briony May Smith

### **My Bollywood Dream**

Avani Dwivedi

### **My Dad Is a Tree**

Jon Agee

### **Rita and Ralph's Rotten Day**

Carmen Agra Deedy, illus. Pete Oswald

### **Thunderboots**

Naomi Jones, illus. Rebecca Ashdown

### **Unicorn Not Wanted**

Fred Blunt, illus. Fred Blunt

## **Junior books**

### **The City of Stolen Magic**

Nazneen Ahmed Pathak

### **Cosima Unfortunate Steals a Star**

Laura Noakes, illus. Flavia Sorrentino

### **The Deadlands: Hunted**

Skye Melki-Wegner

### **Greenwild: The World Behind the Door**

Pari Thomson

### **Interdimensional Explorers**

Lorraine Gregory, illus. Jo Lindley

### **The Last Mapmaker**

Christina Soontornvat

### **Lily Grim and the City of Undone**

Andy Ruffell

### **Michael the Amazing Mind-Reading**

#### **Sausage Dog**

Terrie Chilvers, illus. Tim Budgen

### **My Life On Fire**

Cath Howe

### **The Not-So-Uniform Life of Holly-Mei**

Christina Matula, illus. Yao Xiao

### **Pizza Pete and the Perilous Potions**

Carrie Sellon, illus. Sarah Horne

### **The Princess in Black and the Prince in Pink**

Shannon Hale and Dean Hale, illus. LeUyen Pham

### **Skulduggery Pleasant: Hell Breaks**

#### **Loose**

Derek Landy

### **The Thief of Farrowfell**

Ravena Guron

## **Young Adult books**

### **A Calamity of Mannerings**

Joanna Nadin

### **Bite Risk**

S.J Wills

### **Dance of Thieves**

Mary E. Pearson

### **The Dos and Donuts of Love**

Adiba Jaigardar

### **Gwen and Art Are NOT In Love**

Lex Croucher

### **Her Good Side**

Rebekah Weatherspoon

### **How Far We've Come**

Joyce Efia Harmer, illus. Natasha Mackenzie

### **Just Like Everyone Else**

Sarah Hagger-Holt

### **The Lesbiana's Guide to Catholic School**

Sonora Reyes

### **Lose You To Find Me**

Erik J Brown

### **Lying in the Deep**

Diana Urban

### **The Sharp Edge of Silence**

Cameron Kelly Rosenblum

### **Teen Titans: Robin**

Kami Garcia and Gabriel Picolo

### **The Thing About Lemons**

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Dr Sheila Kanani, illus. Liz Kay

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### **Little Green Fingers: Easy Peasy Gardening Activities**

Claire Phillip, illus. Aitch, trans. Laure Afchain

### **Mama Mammals: Reproduction and Birth in Mammals**

Cathy Evans, illus. Bia Melo

### **Mona Lisa and the Others**

Alice Harman, illus. Quentin Blake

### **Rivers**

Simon Chapman, illus. Qu Lan

### **Stone Age Beasts**

Ben Lerwill, illus. Grahame Baker-Smith

### **The Who, What, Why of Zoology**

Jules Howard, illus. Lucy Letherland

### **You Are a Story**

Laura Dockrill