



Armadillo

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Books Reviewed

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Picture books

A Cat Called Waverley

Debi Gliori, pub. Otter-Barry books

A Cat Called Waverley will tug at your heart strings with its poignant tale of enduring love, loyalty, friendship, and homelessness - and because it's a gorgeous picture book: the loyal character is a little ginger cat (probably gave that away in the title...)

It is the most beautiful tale of Waverley and his owner – well, the human he chose as his owner – and how loyalty can be stretched but never broken, even though those involved change. The little cat befriends many people after being born in a park in Edinburgh, but he loves Donald most. Donald and the little cat are separated when Donald leaves to fight in a war far away. Time goes by, the little cat takes up residence at Edinburgh Waverley Station – hence the name – and waits.

Debi Gliori's illustrations bring the story to life with striking black and white pencil drawings, peppered with red, orange, and yellow hues: Donald's hair is ginger, like the cat, there are autumnal leaves, sunsets, flowers – a poppy, barren looking landscapes, and lights from various lamps – variations of yellow through to red. This simple palette casts a thread through the illustrations, a thread linking the little cat to Donald.

It is a beautiful story about a cat and his owner, of loneliness, hope, love, and loyalty. When they meet each other again – for they do - it will make your heart sing and ache all at once. Waverley will promote lots of discussion: love between animals and people, separation, homelessness, hope – and a chance to explain post-traumatic stress disorder, gently but clearly pointed to.

Debi Gliori based her story on a real person and includes few paragraphs about Darren Greenfield at the end of the book. Darren was a homeless war veteran who sat on the steps of Edinburgh Waverley Railway Station. This book is for Darren, for all homeless. A book for everyone.

Anja Stobbart

The Dragon with the Blazing Bottom

Beach, pub. Simon and Schuster

Upon picking up this colourful, large book I was immediately drawn to the shiny foil lettering - the bright red jumping out from the blue background. I immediately got the vibe that this was a silly, fun book from the title and the cover illustration. I was intrigued to read the story!

The story itself did not disappoint. It is a jovial, simple rhyme that has certainly been written with children in mind. It is about a dragon that cannot breathe fire and then realises he can make fire - from his bottom! Kids will love the rude and funny story, especially on the page that has a full illustration and only one large word ... FART! I can already imagine lots of giggles and laughter.

The illustrations are very well done and work in perfect harmony with the story - probably because the writer is also the illustrator. The text is easy to read and isn't squashed into the pictures so your eyes follow naturally.

There isn't much negative I can say about this book. I wasn't so bothered about the protagonist - the knight Sir Wayne. He just didn't stand out or seem to have much of a personality to me. If it had been a feisty female knight then it would have been a perfect book! As it is, the dragon steals the show.

Parents will enjoy reading the witty, humorous story as kids of all ages laugh along, so it is definitely worth a read.

Izzy Bean

Hardly Haunted

Jessie Sima, pub. Simon and Schuster

When I review books, I ask myself "What does this book do, that others don't?" Does it fill a gap? I look at the message. I think about the characters. Are they representative? Does the story reveal something interesting about society (past or present)? Do the illustrations reflect, enhance, or detract? I consider the vocabulary. Is it age appropriate? Does it develop language and understanding in young minds? I opened *Hardly Haunted* with some of these thoughts in mind.

The story begins with an abandoned Addams Family style house. It feels decrepit, unloved, and very lonely. The house itself suspects that it might be haunted – the reason for all its troubles. What can it do? It can hold its breath and try very hard not to be squeaky, rattly, or scratchy. What happens? It fails in spectacular fashion! The cacophonous concert of spooky sounds attracts a, reassuringly normal, family of ghosts who turn the house into a home. All is happy ever after.

The story is told with a gentle portrayal, through text and illustration, of all things macabre and spooky. Black cats, bats, spiders, dust sheets, crows and onomatopoeic noises abound. It is immensely fun to read aloud! With Hallowe'en now an established festival in this country and a shortage of books for young children that introduce the concept of 'hauntedness' in a friendly and approachable way *Hardly Haunted* is a welcome addition to the genre.

It strikes a similar note to Allan Ahlberg's *Funny Bones* series. Many young children have a natural fear of the dark and noises in the night; the sweetness of the delivery will help them explore and exorcise their fears. The plot is satisfying with two strong messages: learn to accept ourselves and everyone is worthy of love. The language is accessible – one or two words can't be construed from the text. The illustrations direct and uncomplicated. A child could 'read' the story by looking at the pictures (often a hallmark of a well-planned book).

I recommend this book unreservedly to parents and teachers – just buy it before Hallowe'en!

Katherine Wilson

It's Only One

Tracey Corderoy, illus. Tony Neal, pub. Little Tiger

Sunnyville is a perfect place to live. Everyone is happy and friendly and the whole place 'twinkled with total loveliness'. But then Rhino drops a sweet wrapper onto the floor. "What?" he asks the undoubtedly shocked reader, "It's only one..." Many readers will identify with this attitude as no one ever blames themselves for all the litter and waste that mounts up. We then see all the other inhabitants of Sunnyville adopting the same attitude. Soon, there are piles of rubbish everywhere.

Giraffe is disgusted by the sight of piles of rubbish, so he decides to hide it from sight by placing a flower in a vase on his windowsill. A flower that we see him picking from the park. "What?" he asks. "It's only one." Needless to say, we then see all of the other characters picking flowers and fighting over them until there is nothing left.

Tracey Corderoy then cleverly moves on to noise pollution in a similar way. It's not long before Sunnyville has changed from a lovely place to live, into a horrible place where everyone is sad and grumpy. Luckily, mouse has a plan to transform Sunnyville and restore its former beauty – but it's a big task and he can't do it on his own. Fortunately, there are lots of willing volunteers who are happy to work together.

The book ends on a positive note and has some useful suggestions from the author and illustrator that everyone can follow. *It's Only One* is a great introduction to environmental issues and in taking responsibility for your own actions. Tracey Corderoy's text is delightfully complemented by Tony Neal's fun and attractive character illustrations.

This would be a great book to share with a class learning about pollution in the community and how it can be reduced in a simple but effective way. It's also a fun book to share in itself.

Damian Harvey

The Last Seaweed Pie

Wenda Shurety, illus. Paddy Donnelly, pub. Storyhouse Publishing

The Treeple live high up in the trees, where they are busy building and making – and throwing things away. The Seaple live deep down in the ocean, at one with nature. The Treeple and the Seaple don't encounter each other until the Treeple's discarded creations start to turn the Seaple's world dark and gloomy, eventually forcing them to leave their home to look for a new place to live.

When they meet each other, the Seaple share their creativity about reusing and recycling old objects, and the Treeple embrace this new idea wholeheartedly. The Seaple are able to return to their home – and they've made some new friends along the way too.

For me whilst this is both a highly original and very entertaining story it's the illustrations that really steal the show – with wonderful colours, fantastic detail and expressive characters, they're a real visual feast. I thought I knew what seaweed looked like and although I had no idea what Treeple or Seaple looked like I was brilliantly and happily surprised to discover more about all of them. With so many hues of blues and green used the splashes of red, yellow and purple are magnificent. Read the words but please, don't forget to absorb so much more from the illustrations in this magnificent, entertaining and educational story.

The message of this story is very clear, very important, and very thoughtfully delivered. This book is also raising money for charity, with 3% of the cover price going to the Marine Conservation Society.

Lucy H

The Little Wooden Robot and the Log Princess

Tom Gauld, pub. Templar

The Little Wooden Robot and the Log Princess is Tom Gauld's first picture book for children, and it is a delight from start to finish. The story itself nicely fits into the realm of the traditional fairy-tale, but has, as the title suggests, a pinch of the modern which will lend additional appeal to a young audience.

We are introduced to a king and queen who are happy but have no children. The king goes to see an inventor and the queen a witch – both ask for a child. The inventor makes a little wooden robot and the witch magically transforms a log into a little princess. As is only fitting, the king, queen, wooden robot and log princess, love each other very much, but the princess has a secret. When she falls asleep, she turns back into a log and can only be awoken on hearing the magic words, "awake, little log, awake." Luckily, the Little Wooden Robot knows this.

One night the robot leaves the palace without waking the princess. He returns to find the princess has been mistakenly thrown out of the window, here begin the adventures. The log is carried far away, robot goes in search, having many untold adventures along the way. Needless to say although they are reunited the story is far from over – they must find their way home, so begins another series of untold (though named) adventures.

The story ends happily, but a lot takes places along the way. Children will love the adventures of the two heroes and could have fun talking about what might have taken place in the untold adventures ('The Family of Robbers', 'The Giant's Key', 'The Lonely Bear' etc) offer scope for classroom activities.

Tom Gauld is a British cartoonist and illustrator, born and raised in Scotland. His work is regularly published in *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian* and the *New Scientist*. He's published several comic books and a graphic novel. This is his first picture book for children, I'd be disappointed if it was his last.

Damian Harvey

Oh Monty!

Susannah Lloyd, illus. Nici Gregory, pub. Pavilion

Monty, the most pampered and privileged puss since *the Aristocats*, along with his fellow feline, Tiddles, is tasked with looking after his indulgent owner's freshly-baked cake, an enormous confection decorated with extra chocolate and piled high with bonbons. But of course, cunning Monty can't be trusted. He devours this most marvellous cake and, on his owner's return easily fools her into thinking the less-favoured Tiddles is to blame!

Another equally tempting cake is baked and left and of course the devious Monty devours this one too, despite poor Tiddles' best efforts to stop him. For a second time, helpless Tiddles takes the blame while Monty is rewarded for Tiddles' presumed naughtiness with...a nice slice of cake.

The genius of this lively, engaging picture book lies in the superbly clever telling of the story. The narrative consists entirely of the words Monty's owner speaks aloud to her pampered cats. Only her heavily-ring laden hands are shown, setting down the cake - in true Tom and Jerry style. This lends the book tremendous potential for reading aloud, building suspense as the drama unfolds and with a real sense of anticipation at each page turn. Even the youngest children will enjoy the dramatic irony of knowing the truth about the supposedly saintly Monty!

The bright pastel colour palette matches the sugary bakes perfectly while the cats themselves are brought brilliantly to life by illustrator, Nici Gregory. These are cats with huge attitude, characterful

rather than cutesy, drawn with elegant lines as befits their pampered status and given completely hilarious facial expressions. The high-energy illustrations capture the drama of the storyline perfectly, with striking, wordless double spreads as disaster strikes - and duplicitous Monty seemingly gets away with his crimes! This morally debatable ending makes this a perfect book to spark discussion around right and wrong at KS1 as well as to enjoy in EYFS. Fingers crossed for a whole series of stories featuring Monty and Tiddles in future!

Eileen Armstrong

Pablo At The Zoo

Grainne McGuinness, illus. Michael White, pub. Ladybird

Pablo is a young autistic boy, who has created a wonderful set of Book Animals and includes them in the stories that he creates. In this story his mother takes him (and of course the animals) to the Zoo, where all the book animals are able to meet up with their real life 'families'. All, that is, except Noa, who cannot seem to find any other dinosaurs. Luckily, he realizes that there is more than one kind of family and that his family of Pablo and the book animals is just as important as any other kind.

This is a magical story that highlights the wonderful imagination of a child and the world that he is able to create. It also shows how we all interpret 'family' in different ways and how important sharing friendship and empathy can be. I love the way that Pablo and the animals are illustrated, they really are naïve and yet totally recognisable, so that children will be able to feel as if they can draw as well. It is a delightful story for those in nursery and reception and leads on to lots of discussion about the various topics.

Some readers may be aware of Pablo from the series on CBeebies, whether you are or not this book will make an excellent addition to any home library, helping children with or without autism to understand some important messages. It may be interesting for adult readers to know that this, and all the Pablo stories, have been written by authors on the autistic spectrum and that this is one of six books currently featuring this character and his collection of animals.

Margaret Pemberton

The Rapping Princess

Hannah Lee, illus. Allen Fatimaharan, pub. Faber & Faber

Join the talented Hannah Lee and Allen Fatimaharan band wagon once again. Rhythm, rhyme and a story, the essence of rap. A great little book with friendly text for a 6+ year old reader and pictures that will captivate a child aged 3 upwards. They could be at school, perhaps an organised rapping

competition between classmates. A tempting prospect for the reluctant reader, as everyone laughs and has a good time; the best way to learn. Or perhaps at home, you can all take it in turn. It's infectious.

An inspiring short plot about working on your strengths and not wasting time bemoaning your weaknesses is what greets the reader. Princess Shiloh wishes to sing well more than anything else. All the other princesses can so why not her. She visits the doctor and is told by her coach that "talent can't be taught." Ouch! One day when coming back from her lesson she hears some visiting princes rapping together. Their sound is good, but Shiloh knows she could do better. Her shyness vanishes and out flows her rhythm, speed, and talent. The princes adore her. It is not enough, still Shiloh wants to sing, not rap. "Your voice chooses you" Shiloh's mother advises. "Stop this child, do not look and compare, search yourself, your talent is there." Shiloh rushes into her bedroom, poised to cry and asks her mirror "Why?" The reply returned: "Your voice is unique, your rapping's divine." Having a wave of inspiration Shiloh invites people to "Come and listen to the voice that I have found." The palace is packed and with her sister's singing back-up, Shiloh skilfully demonstrates her talent.

This little book teaches us the importance of applauding the unusual in others and ourselves. Don't be a clone.

Elizabeth Negus

Ratty's Big Adventure

Lara Hawthorne, pub. Big Picture Press

Since the turn of the century – recently in terms of human history and scientific discovery, over 40 new species of animal and plant were discovered and identified at Mount Bosavi in Papua New Guinea. Bear with me, you are reading a picture book review here, but I think it is, in this instance fascinating and important to give you the background to its inception.

Lara Hawthorne was inspired by these recent discoveries. As one of our best picture book and illustrated non-fiction new talents, an author and illustrator previously shortlisted for the Greenaway book prize, she has worked with the documentary scientific team from the BBC who broadcast the Mount Bosavi discoveries, to create Ratty's story.

Meet Ratty. An enormous, vegetarian rat whose home, we are told, lies deep in the crater of an extinct and ancient volcano hidden deep in the rainforest. Ratty's home is perfect, difficult to get into and out of, it is a place where he feels safe, where he has everything he needs, and is close enough to all his friends. Ratty loves to nibble on forest fruits and rest. Ratty is lazy though and on spying a delicious, bright fruit right at the top of a tree he knows he must have it. The sweetest fruit being always that which is the furthest away. Ratty does it, he makes it to the top of the tree but then he stops and looks in wonder for here is the most beautiful sight – a world full of bigger and better things. But is it?

Ratty is about to learn that the world may be a big and beautiful place but that sometimes there is no place like home. Brimming with delicious, tantalising illustrations of new and wonderful life this delightful story is both a joy to read and a fantastic learning journey.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Saving Mr Hoot

Helen Stephens, pub. Scholastic

An owl lives in the tree outside Ben's house. Ben calls him Mr. Hoot. From his bedroom, Ben calls to Mr. Hoot every night and Mr. Hoot calls back. We then learn that the grown-ups want to chop down the tree where Mr. Hoot lives. Mr. Hoot is in danger. Can Ben act quickly enough to save the owl?

This is a warm, funny and inspirational story book for very young readers. It is a lovely picture book with beautiful illustrations throughout and a brilliant front cover design, with gold foil titles. The book is a perfect bedtime story for younger children to share with their parents. It is even better for the children because adults don't seem to be able to see the owl. For the children it feels as though the book is holding a secret within its pages just for them. In addition, we quickly discover the special friendship between Ben and the owl who lives just outside his bedroom window.

The story demonstrates that we can all protect wildlife, the very wildlife that is the closest to us and all around us. It is a lovely celebration of the wildlife living on our doorsteps and it is bound to inspire children to look out for wildlife and then help them learn how to look after it.

The author, Helen Stephens, was inspired by an owl living in some trees in her street. It encouraged her to write this story. She could hear him hoot at night. Sadly, the trees were chopped down to make way for new streetlights. That owl was never seen again. Thanks to Ben this story has a much happier ending.

Gary Kenworthy

Storm In A Jar

Samuel Langley-Swain, illus. Katie Cottle, pub. Owlet Press

Arlo visited Nana every Sunday. Her house was full of flowers and she gave him sweets from a special glass jar. When Nana passes away, Arlo keeps the special glass sweetie jar with him. It makes him feel safe during the sad times.

Over time Arlo's sadness builds and turns itself to anger, as this happens at the same time a storm begins to grow in the jar. Eventually, when he can take it no more, Arlo smashes the glass and the storm escapes, taking the swirling seas, black jellyfish and broken boats that have formed inside it, with it. Finally, as the glass smashes and the storm dissipates Arlo sees Nana sailing contentedly on a calm sea and he knows that she will be okay. *Storm In A Jar* is a powerful metaphor for internalised anger and grief.

Samuel Langley-Swain, the founder of Owlet Press, was inspired to write this book when his own son described his feelings of anger and frustration as building up like 'a storm in a jar'. It was important to him that the book addressed the emotional aftermath of loss with the purpose of strengthening children's mental health. The expressive illustrations, by award-winning Katie Cottle, capture the intensity of Arlo's emotions beautifully.

Honest, profound and accessible, this story provides the perfect springboard to talk about the passing of loved ones, and the danger of bottling up our feelings. It's a truly special book.

Abby Mellor

That Dinosaur Has Talent!

Lily Murray, illus. Richard Merritt, pub. Michael O'Mara Books

That Dinosaur Has Talent! is a story about Parry, a small dinosaur who is so overwhelmed by the skills and abilities of all the other dinosaurs, he feels left out. Raptors are helping in restaurants, Ankylosaurs are building, Stegosaurus drive buses and the Troodon teachers are teaching. It seems to Parry that everyone can do something but him. When Parry's friend, Eliza Jane, sees how sad the little dinosaur is, she tells him there are lots of things he could do. Paint the town, be a cook, hand out books in the library but, sadly, although Parry tries his best, everything he does goes wrong.

As Parry grows sadder and sadder, Eliza Jane takes him home and tucks him up in bed but during the night, wide awake and worrying about Parry, Eliza Jane hears the sound of someone dancing and singing out there in the moonlight. When she looks out of the window, it's Parry and she realizes he has a wonderful talent. Cue the Talent Show. All the dinosaurs enter the Talent Show but when Parry goes onto the stage he is so frightened he can't move until Eliza Jane, stands beside him. Then he sings and dances so beautifully, he wins the show.

The illustrations are fabulous, so full of life and colour that each page will hold a child's interest and attention again and again; every page reaching out to draw a child deep into this lovely story of enabling friendship. The story is told in rhyming verse of four simple lines which is clear and easily understood. A lovely book that will welcome a reader no matter how many times *That Dinosaur Has Talent!* is read.

Gwen Grant

Time to Move South for Winter

Clare Helen Welsh, illus. Jenny Løvlie, pub. Nosy Crow

The tiny Arctic tern makes the longest migration of any animal on earth, travelling the equivalent of three return trips to the moon during its lifetime as it follows the summers between the Arctic and Antarctic, of which just one trip can take up to three months. Welsh and Løvlie have created a beautiful non-fiction picture book following just one of these Arctic to Antarctic mammoth expeditions that the little bird makes and features various other creatures it encounters along the way that are making their own migratory treks as they move south for the winter.

The endpapers include a brief passage on each of these animals with plenty of facts like those above, but the main story is a warm, lyrical tale with a repetitive verse and lovely imagery such as the Canada geese soaring past like planes, or the tern being caught up in a kaleidoscope of colour and wings as a swarm of monarch butterflies sail past.

Other creatures include humpback whales, caribou, and leatherback turtles. As well as looking at winter migration the book can be used to explore different animal habitats, various landscapes, the movement of seasons and temperatures around the globe (there is an endpaper illustration showing the route each takes across the globe), and the life cycle of the tern itself as a young bird in the Arctic, growing up during its journey and Antarctic summer, and then returning to the Arctic summer with its own baby.

The author is also a primary school teacher, and the book is a clever mix of fact and fiction which can be the basis of many classroom activities as well as a nice group read. The illustrator, who won the Waterstones' Children's Book Prize Illustrated Book of the Year in 2019 for Lauren Ace's *The Girls* has created beautiful, engaging, atmospheric pictures showcasing the tern's great expedition brilliantly. The vivid colours, rich patterns and textures, evocation of light and movement, sense of character in the animals, and the change in ambience of each environment really enhance this into a wonderful book.

Natalie McCrystal Plimmer

Too Many Bubbles: A Story about Mindfulness

Christine Peck, illus. Mags Deroma, pub. Sourcebooks

Can there really be such a thing as too many bubbles? For Izzy, yes there can be. It starts off with one little bubble, one grumpy bubble, a thought bubble that refuses to go away. Wherever Izzy goes so does the thought bubble and then...another pops up. Before long there is another. If this continues then these bubbles are going to take over everything. Izzy needs to find a way to control them.

Izzy is a delightful character, she is a little blue mouse set against very white pages so that we can clearly see her, follow her and her thought bubble too. The text which makes up her story is also sparing but every word counts. Christine Peck has carefully chosen what to say and how to say it for the biggest impact and to help us consider every word we read. Mags Deroma's illustrations are gentle and even though they barely take up space on the page they manage to fill it in our imaginations. Some pages dazzle us with colour, others give space to think. We can think using the words too. We can think about Izzy's thought bubble. Follow it as it grows, see it multiply and then see them all take over and push Izzy out.

What are we learning as we follow the story? That we all have thoughts. That they can overcrowd our minds that the way to cope is with calm, deep breaths, and space. This book is one of a series designed to help children to overcome worries. It is a gentle story with a strong message and accompanying notes for parents. A charming, calming read. An important message.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Junior Books

Adam-2

Alastair Chisholm, pub. Nosy Crow

Today was different. After two hundred and forty-three years, eight months and six days, different is good. Although Adam's days may have been exactly the same for all this time, the world has changed.

Adam is confused. The maps and pictures stored in his memory are of an Edinburgh, much like today, full of intact buildings, gardens and trees, bustling with people, with Castle Rock towering above. The city he walks through is desolate with blackened out shells of buildings, populated by birds and animals and over-grown. Humans and funks are at war. A war of annihilation. Unbeknown to either side, one they are both close to winning.

The three main characters, in order of introduction, Adam, Runa and Linden, have a complex relationship. Adam, technically Adam-2, is a humanoid robot of a by-gone era with an extraordinary capacity to think for himself. Runa, an orphan, is partly-mechanized and, in a human society fearful of machines, further outcast. Linden is non-binary, something matter-of-factly introduced early in the book, his mother was killed by the funks and he wants all funks destroyed. It is perhaps the characters of Adam-2 and Linden that reflect most intensely on what it means to be human. For Adam, human behaviour often causes problems as he tries desperately to adhere to inconsistent, contradictory information. Meanwhile Linden's deep-seated resentment, prejudice even, seems impossible to shake. If Adam is too naïve and trusting, Linden does not trust at all.

The funks or functional consciousness are robots. Little more than mechanical slaves, they were reprogrammed to fight, to kill their human creators. Their limited programming has meant humans have survived, lacking the ingenuity and creativity to change tactics and adapt as the fighting continues. Adam is the key to both sides winning. On the human side, Adam has the skills needed to repair obsolete technology that can be rearmed and reused. On the funks' side, Adam can problem-solve and overcome the barriers allowing them to access top-secret information. Adam unwittingly is the destruction of them all...except him.

Adam-2's messianic name, title of this brilliant science-fiction novel is tantalizing. Will he save the world?

Simon Barrett

The Beatryce Prophecy

Kate DiCamillo, illus. Sophie Blackwell, pub. Walker Books

The Beatryce Prophecy is a glorious 'folktale' style novel set in the Medieval era. The partnership between Kate DiCamillo (who was twice winner of the Newbury Medal) and Sophie Blackwell (who was twice winner of the Caldecott Medal) is a perfect combination. The intricate black and white ink illustrations compliment and highlight the lyrical writing in a magical, atmospheric way that keeps the readers turning the pages. Each chapter begins with an enlarged, decorative, inhabited initial letter, giving the book a historical, illuminated manuscript feel.

At the heart of the novel is Beatryce, found by Brother Edik in the barn at the Order of the Chronicles of Sorrowing. He's shocked to discover her curled up next to Answelica, the ferocious goat, clutching the goat's ear as a comforter. The monks are afraid of Answelica, comparing her to a demon, she bites and has a nasty habit of butting them in the backside. The only thing Beatryce remembers is her name. When Brother Edik finds out she can read and write he fears for her safety. He shaves her head and disguises her as a young monk. Answelica is her constant companion and protector.

Kate DiCamillo expertly creates her characters with vivid evocative details - Brother Edik's wandering eye that dances around in its socket and Answelica's sharp teeth and hard uncompromising head. I particularly like the way Kate DiCamillo does not name the antagonists. Throughout the story they are nameless shadows who are hunting Beatryce because of a prophecy.

The monks are the creators and keepers of the Chronicles of Sorrowing. They record what has happened and has not yet happened. A prophecy was foreseen by Brother Edik and has been previously ignored, it states a girl child will come who will unseat a king. This king has been manipulated by an evil counsellor. Beatryce embraces the prophecy and heads off to confront the king, find her mother. She is with a misfit group of characters including Answelica the goat, 12-year-old Jack Dory, a bee, Brother Edik and Cannoc an old, bearded vagabond who lives inside a tree and claims he used to be king.

The book encompasses themes of love, courage and determination, ideal for KS2 book corners and libraries.

Anita Loughrey

Reviewer's Website: www.anitaloughrey.com

The Book Cat

Polly Faber, illus. Clara Vulliamy, pub. Faber and Faber

Morgan is a young orphan cat who has to scarp and scavenge to survive on the streets of London before his luck changes and he finds his way to a new life via the chimney of the Faber and Faber

publishing building! What a fantastic co-incidence that they are the publishers of this beautiful book written by the talented Polly Faber and illustrated by the equally talented Clara Vulliamy.

The Book Cat is a beautiful wartime story that involves a real cat who decided to make his home in the Faber publishing offices. Other cats are attracted to Morgan as he becomes quite the famous cat of Russell Square, the home of the publisher and now Morgan. The cats all come to Morgan's new home to eat, rest, share stories and party together – forgetting about the awful war that disturbs the streets of London. Morgan then takes it upon himself to help other cats in the area find their own homes with various authors and publishers.

The illustrations in this book are absolutely wonderful, with each of the delightful cats enjoying themselves in various situations. They are shown to us on each double spread, keeping the story lively for younger readers, and Clara has used a limited palette of certain colours so that the dark colours contrast with the bolder pinks and reds to really stand out.

The Book Cat is a gorgeous read which lends itself to a range of readers of different abilities. If you love animals - and in particular cats – then this book will be right up your street!

Tom Joy

Curse of the Dearmad

Emma Mylrea, illus. Hannah Jesse, pub. Tiny Tree Children's Books

Curse of the Dearmad is a story about friendships, family issues, character building and 'gillies' - humans who, like fish, have gills which makes them amphibious. Throughout the novel, we follow the adventures of Nell, her brother Percy, and Connor.

Nell is a strong and fearless young girl, who would do anything to protect those closest to her. Although she's slightly jealous of Percy for being the 'gifted one,' she shows the strength of character to accept it rather than let it affect their family ties. Connor is a brave young boy, and despite Nell disliking him, she does everything she can to save him - an important lesson to younger readers in the acts of kindness and humility. Percy, on the other hand, does not possess any humility. As he's the 'gifted one,' he looks down on others and believes they are weak. At the start of the story, he never fully appreciates his sister's bravery with her special gift, nor Connor's strength or courage. However, each of the three protagonists develop in their own ways throughout the story, making this book great for learning the art of character building.

Curse of the Dearmad has an interesting storyline, with mystical elements about a cave, an island and the surrounding water. There's a map of the area, a dictionary entry showing the definition of 'gilly,' and a labelled diagram of the skeletal structure of gillies. These help the reader to visualise the scene

and understand what 'gillies' are and what they look like. Each chapter has a playful subtitle and a small illustration of the scene, which helps the reader to visualise the characters and the changing scenery of the narrative.

The story contains scenes of family issues, which personify the characters and make them more three dimensional - as though they are real people, not fictional characters. The book is captivating, moralistic and educational, and will appeal to young explorers and inquisitive readers.

Chris J Kenworthy

Diary of an Accidental Witch

Perdita and Honor Cargill, illus. Katie Saunders, pub. Little Tiger

Fans of *The Worst Witch* will enjoy this magical adventure. Bea and her scientist Dad have just moved to Little Spellshire, as Dad is writing a book about its famously freaky microclimate. There are a couple of clues there that this is no ordinary town, and the shops are special too - Mr. Riggle's Emporium sells all sorts of odd things, like fresh cuckoo spit... It's big enough to have two schools, The Academy, where Bea's next-door new friend Ash goes, and 'the other school', the School of Extraordinary Arts, which is in the forest and, of course, as absent-minded Dad makes a mess of registering Bea, that is the one she goes to. She is furious, and wants this changed, but that will take time, naturally.

The story is told in the form of a diary, and it's very funny, as Bea's career at the school is full of mishaps, not always her fault, and her efforts to fit in, usually involving trying to do magic, just cause more chaos. Using her wand to do levitation is particularly challenging! Once she masters riding on a broomstick, though, she turns out to be very good at the sport of Go, and gradually gets involved in school activities, especially in planning for the Hallowe'en party. That turns out to be 'the best party ever', with Bea having fun with her new friends and finally managing to use her magic wand to avert a crisis. She is still buzzing when Dad tells her that she has been accepted at The Academy, but the reader will have guessed by now that this is no longer what she wants, and, at the end of the book, she is looking forward to writing new hopes and plans into her next diary.

Katie Saunders' cartoon illustrations on most of the pages are perfectly suited to the mayhem in the story, and the diary format means that the text, in something like Comic Sans, with a round 'a', is broken up into very manageable chunks - this will be fun for readers of about 8-11.

Diana Barnes

Leo's Map of Monsters: The Nightmare

Kris Humphrey, illus. Pete Williamson, pub. Oxford University Press

As the Guardian's apprentice, Leo Wilder must protect his village from the monsters that lurk in the surrounding forest. His job is secret, but that secret has come under threat. To protect his world, Leo must use his Slingshot, Magical Stones and Monster Map - oh and his monster friend Starla, to battle it out with the deadly Frightmare, a powerful Monster that haunts the abandoned ruins, breathing ghostly blue fire at any intruder. With only two stones and with so much at stake this surely will be Leo's most dangerous monster mission so far.

This book is awesome, it is an action packed, adventure filled, fantastical book. The story itself starts off with a normal day in the life of Leo, the Guardian's apprentice and spins off into a whole world of thrills and excitement. This book is great if you struggle to sit down for long periods of time or are reading a long book and need a bit of a break, since this book is fast paced, action packed and full of brilliant illustrations from Pete Williamson.

The age rating for this book, in my opinion is about 7 plus, as it is a bit spooky at points and features some vocabulary that may be slightly advanced but to be honest, I wouldn't be surprised to see a six-year-old reading this thrilling story. The authors skills at 'fantasy world' building are credible and the way he makes it accessible for those who haven't read the first two is great.

So, to conclude, this book is a spectacular quick read with cool illustrations. So do yourself a favour and read it.

Archie, Age 10

Listen, Layla

Yassmin Abdel-Magied, pub. Puffin

Listen, Layla is the sequel to *You must be Layla* although if you've never encountered Layla before it's not an issue as this book stands perfectly well on its own.

Irrepressible and passionate Sudanese-Australian Layla is a wannabe inventor who is part of a design team at school. The team are about to enter the Grand Designs Turismo and there is a lot to be done to ensure they have an award-winning invention ready on time. However, things don't go to plan when Layla's life is thrown into turmoil with the news that her grandmother is sick in Sudan and the family must fly out straight away. Layla is suddenly torn between family and her dreams, and for a young teenage girl who is still under the guidance of her family she has little say in what happens next.

The story follows Layla not only on her trip to Sudan but on a voyage of discovery as she begins to question her identity and where she belongs. Is she Australian? Or Sudanese? How and where does

she fit in and why will no-one let her just do what she wants? A flawed character, Layla exhibits the sometimes arrogant and selfish nature of young teens who sometimes forget that their actions have an impact on others. In this book Yassmin Abdel-Magied has managed to create a believable teenage girl who still has a lot to learn in life and I found myself torn as I read through some of the interactions between Layla and her family, remembering only too well that teenage frustration that Layla exhibits so perfectly, whilst feeling myself empathise with her parents as a parent to teenagers myself.

Set around the time of the Sudanese revolution (2018 -2019), the book covers many themes such as racism, stereotypes and human rights and is perfect for teens who are just exploring the world beyond their own bubble.

The only downside for me was that it initially took me a little while to get into due to the many acronyms and Arabic words (for which there is a very handy glossary at the back of the book). However, this really helped set the tone of the book and I was soon gripped by Layla's dramas. Overall a gripping read and one which doesn't shy away from real issues and real characters.

Tracey Corner

Locked Out Lily

Nick Lake, illus. Emily Gravett, pub. Simon & Schuster

When Lily is diagnosed with a debilitating illness which requires constant hospital treatment her world is shattered, even more so when her parents announce the imminent arrival of a new baby. Angry and resentful, Lily pushes away those who love her most leaving her frightened and alone.

When the baby arrives, Lily is sent to stay with her grandmother but is determined to return to her own home so runs away. It is here she embarks on a frightening adventure where she encounters strange beings who have invaded her house and are pretending to be her parents.

Locked out Lily is a powerful story exploring what happens when we allow our fears and insecurities to take control of us instead of confronting what worries us. Lily allows her illness to redefine who she is, and it is only through the support and guidance of an unlikely group of friends that she finds the courage to confront both her sickness and her fear of rejection by her family.

Nick Lake writes a magical tale with superb twists to keep young readers gripped, however, possibly the most engaging narrative thread is the friendship that develops between the unlikely group of comrades. They not only help her conquer the invaders but most importantly her own demons. There is mighty Mouse with his armoury of weapons, Mole who does not need to see to be insightful as well as know-it-all Crow and slippery Snake.

Emily Gravett's wonderful illustrations defy the age-old-saying that a book should not be judged by its cover. The eye-catching sleeve is hauntingly beautiful and immediately draws the reader not only into the pages but also into the mystery of the key which can unlock Lily's future.

Lake's modern classic intertwines beautiful imagery, excitement and humour but most importantly this is powerful reminder that none of us can face our adversaries alone.

Paulie Hurry

Nell and the Cave Bear

Martin Brown, pub. Piccadilly Press

Nell and the Cave Bear is an enchanting new adventure for fans of illustrated fiction. Perfect for younger readers enjoying their first foray into chapter books, or for older readers wanting a prehistoric adventure.

Prepare for friendship and fun as you embark on a journey with Nell in the aim to protect her cave bear. Nell has a pet cave bear and her pet cave bear is her port in the storm of life – he is the one who keeps her comforted in the absence of her parents. When Nell's tribe hear that another tribe is planning to visit, they realise that they need a gift for them. Overhearing the grown-ups' plans to gift her Cave Bear, Nell makes the bold decision to run away.

Set in prehistoric times, Nell must find the courage to face the hardships of a journey in a big and unknown wider world with its own tough hardships awaiting and with just her cave bear for company. At times the story is funny but this is mixed with often poignant moments of friendship making this a beautiful book, a book to read, to absorb, to feel at one with. The journey that Nell and her Cave Bear take will have them following a stream from their cave through the wilderness where they will face giant mammoths, hunters and hunger. Together they can face anything! An uplifting and positive tale.

A story that has been simply told but with wonderful illustrations, I can see this being very popular with children of all ages.

Erin Hamilton

Polly Pecorino: The Girl Who Rescues Animals

Emma Chichester Clarke, pub. Walker books

Are you brave enough to go down to the Wild Bear Woods? Polly doesn't know if she is, but we are about to, with her find out ... Why is Polly not sure? Because she lives in the town, a town enclosed in tall walls, walls that circle the town entirely. Outside the walls live the bears, big ferocious bears.

Inside the town there is a run-down zoo, Polly's uncle works there and Polly helps him out. As we are about to learn, Polly has an amazing talent, she can talk to animals. Therefore, Polly works with her uncle in the zoo and it is an arrangement that works well especially when and if the animals are ill. If this happens then they are able to tell Polly and Polly, in turn, can tell her uncle. Unfortunately for the animals, Polly and her uncle the zoo is owned by Mr and Mrs Snell. They are a devious couple who do not love the animals but will do anything for money.

Mr and Mrs Snell decide that to make more money they need a baby bear, so they steal one. Polly must find courage, call on all her bravery to defeat the Snells, and to return Booboo to his parents. This means finding enough courage to go out of the city and into the woods beyond.

Polly is a wonderful character, showing humans at their best, and demonstrating to the reader that doing the right thing is always best, even if at times it can be scary. This story stayed with me because it shows us the world from the perspective of its animals, we glance into their world. It is a heart-warming book, a charming story, perfect for younger independent readers.

Helen Byles

Rules for Vampires: Get Spooked this Halloween!

Alex Foulkes, illus. Sara Ogilvie, pub. Simon & Schuster

Leo (short for Eleonore) is a vampire. A very young vampire; she's only a hundred and eleven years old, having been turned, and then adopted, by the Great and Terrible Sieglinde von Motteberg a century earlier at the age of eleven. Now it's time for her first Hunt, and it's very important that nothing goes wrong.

Something, of course, goes wrong. Before Leo can snack on Minna, the orphan who is her intended prey, she is interrupted by the evil Orphanmaster. During the fight that follows a fire breaks out, and Leo barely escapes. Minna, it later transpires, does not. She returns as a ghost, which is problematic for Leo, since ghosts and vampires are mortal enemies. Worse still, her ghostly senses tell her that the Orphanmaster, too, is returning with evil intent. The two girls must join together in uneasy alliance to defeat him before he comes into his full unearthly power and makes things rather unpleasant for everybody.

Alex Foulkes has great fun with the central concept of *Rules for Vampires*, playing with established fictional motifs and adding ideas of her own to create an entertaining cast of characters. The twist

regarding Leo's older sister is both funny and clever, while her parents are an unlikely but successful match - mother, an evil vampire overlord (or, er, overlady?); father, an affectionate, absent-minded vampire scientist.

The heart of the book, though, is the growing friendship between Leo and Minna, the two very likeable supernatural protagonists, and their quest to foil the villain of the piece.

There are a few questions that remain unanswered, in whole or in part - why, for instance, is the family's butler a sentient, female, empty suit of armour? But there are sequels on the way in which to address both those and the only lightly touched-upon conflict between Leo's conscience and her vampire nature. In the meantime, *Rules for Vampires* is a fun and at times exciting read, perfect for someone who is developing an interest in horror but is too young to be actually horrified.

John Dougherty

John Dougherty's *Mark & Shark: Detecting & Stuff* is published by Oxford University Press Children's Books.

Tabitha Plimtock and the Edge of the World

Erika McGann, illus. Phillip Cullen, pub. O'Brien

We all know the world is round and has no edge, don't we? But perhaps we just didn't know where to look. Circle the globe enough times and you will find the house of the Plimtock family, teetering on the brink of an enormous cliff face at the very edge of the world. Our resilient heroine, Tabitha, lives with a family of Dahlesque grotesques. Meet foul Aunt Bertha, of unknown but enormous age, thinks every day is her birthday and spends her time festering on her stinking beanbag demanding birthday cake. Cousin Wilbur turns into a different (but equally bad tempered) animal each time the wind changes and Gower and Gristle are no better. Poor Tabitha, the family go-getter (the one who goes and gets things...) must scale the cliff face to gather food and supplies for her ungrateful family.

On her journeys down the cliff face Tabitha finds warmth and friendship with the eccentric characters who live in the wall pockets. Her absolute favourite is Mr Cratchley, who lives below the sunline in a cave of wonders, the most treasured is a jar full of glimmers of lost love blown in on the wind. However, the equilibrium of life at the edge of the world is under threat as rumours abound that the 'whatever-they-ares' lurking at the bottom of the cliff are beginning to climb upwards. Tabitha and the indominable Dr Sherback must find a way to restore harmony.

McGann creates a richly imaginative world which becomes increasingly strange and wonderful the further you descend below the sunline. This world is brought vividly to life in the illustrations, with the fantastical creatures being a particular delight. We share Tabitha's awe as she explores the base of the wall, and she remains curious and inquisitive even about the terrifying parts! This love and

respect for nature combined with her determination to restore the balance of her environment conveys a gentle environmental message.

There is something of Cressida Cowell in the fizz and wit of the narrative voice guiding us through the story. I loved the inventive playing with language, particularly in the spectacular insults that the characters hurl at each other such as ‘malodorous pimple’ or ‘floundering glutfish’. The wry asides and humourous digressions keep the tone bright and sprightly throughout.

Liz Speight

The Week at World’s End

Emma Carroll, pub. Faber & Faber

Did you know that if we learn something in the context of a story it is 75% more likely to stay in our memory? Ok, that statistic is mainly for rhetorical effect but the principle holds: knowledge is a tricky beast – but wrestle it into a narrative and you’ll significantly reduce the chance of it slithering mischievously out of your brain. Thus, as a result of reading *The Week at World’s End* I not only spent an enjoyable few days second guessing the ending (and I admit I really didn’t see it coming) but I can also consider myself to have a solid pub quiz winning level of newfound knowledge about a nail biting time in modern history.

The central plot of *The Week at World’s End* focuses on the main character Stevie Fisher, and her best friend, Ray. Both are outsiders at school – with seemingly little else to define them. However, the mysterious appearance of a girl, Anna, in Stevie’s coal shed brings not only intrigue, but purpose, to their lives as they try to save her. Carroll places this story in the historical context of the Cuban Missile crisis – during the week in 1962 when the world’s fate – like Anna’s – hung in the balance. This is no arbitrary pairing: as the tension mounts in Stevie and Rays’ lives, so to do the tensions on the world stage. A central lesson of the book – which is to stand up for what you believe is right – applies equally to Stevie’s choices in helping her friend Anna, her determination to stand against nuclear weapons and perhaps also the politicians who did, ultimately, put ego to one side and choose dialogue over bombastic posturing.

You can read this book and enjoy the dual mounting tensions and climactic ending. You can also enrich your knowledge of modern history (and retain it to impress your friends at a later date). However - ultimately - this book shows its readers how strong convictions, words and people can make a difference – in our own relationships and in changing the course of history.

Laura Myatt

The Wild Before

Piers Torday, pub. Quercus Children's Books

On a stormy, snowy night the silver calf is born on a farm under a full moon. According to a dream passed down from animal to animal, if the calf dies, terrible things will happen. These terrible events include rising seas, a plague and fire. Little Hare is determined that none of these events will be allowed to happen. Keeping Mooncalf safe however proves to be a difficult task and Little Hare needs the help of all the other creatures.

This is a delightful and charming story where all the main characters are animals. There is also a main theme throughout, about climate change and saving our planet. There is a brave hare and a world in trouble. One hare alone cannot save our world, so this is a story about hope and friendship. Little Hare is fighting against all the odds and against time. Can he do it?

The story sets alarm bells ringing and will make children think about the impact that humans are having on our planet. Little Hare sees how the land is changing and how time is running out. It is a simple story and young readers will understand and relate to the messages and themes. They will already be aware of the climate crisis and can learn that working together will make a difference and there are good as well as bad people in the world.

This book is not all doom and gloom. There are some lovely, light hearted moments within the serious messages. There is a singing field mouse and following the animals is a lot of fun. There is some wonderful descriptive writing and lots of humour. This is a magical story about a lovely little hare determined to save the world. Friendship is important throughout the story and there is hope.

Gary Kenworthy

The Very Dangerous Sisters of Indigo McCloud

John Hearne, pub. Little Island Books

The story is set in a rather dreary city called Blunt, whose chief industry is the manufacture of plastic Christmas trees. Indigo McCloud lives there with his father and his four truly horrible sisters – the worst of whom is the eldest, Peaches. Peaches is sweet and pretty: she charms all the grownups, but terrifies the children as, under the charming exterior, she's a sadistic bully and extortioner. Her fellow sisters are almost as bad and together they form a group of bullies who will stop at nothing to get their own way. However whilst Indigo's other sisters may be awful, they pall into insignificance beside Peaches.

Indigo is terrified of Peaches, but he is determined to resist her, with the help of his friend Polly, who never leaves her bedroom but is a complete whizz at mathematics and IT. Indigo does live a life of

some adventure however and the reader will be thrilled as they are taken with him, leaping across the rooftops of the town of Blunt, trying to keep himself one step ahead of their wicked plans and schemes. There are hungry geese, an avalanche of toilets and even curry to contend with too! When Idigo becomes a threat to her plans Peaches gets him confined to a cruel bootcamp. But in the end, she meets her worst nightmare, and the quietly determined Indigo triumphs, and saves the children of Blunt from his vicious sisters.

It's a dark tale, in which some graphically unpleasant things happen to good people as well as bad. It's anarchic, wildly inventive, and in places very funny. Handle with care!

Sue Purkiss

Young Adult Books

29 Locks

Nicola Garrard, pub. HopeRoad

Before you read *29 Locks*, or halfway through, or when you've finished reading it, or best of all, at all three points, do read this:

<https://www.writersandartists.co.uk/advice/how-my-debut-novel-became-love-letter-london-teenagers>

In this blog post for *Writers & Artists*, Nicola Garrard shows her readers just what happened when she went for her interview at the school Highbury Grove School in Islington, and why she came away determined to teach there: 'For me, *29 Locks* is more than a novel. It is my love letter to those teenagers, bearing witness to their deep stores of courage and resilience; their essential goodness.' Readers need also to take to heart the reason behind the novel's dedication, 'The novel is dedicated to the memory of my former student, Mahad Ali, who was brutally murdered in 2017 at the age of 18.'

Already short-listed for the Lucy Cavendish Fiction Prize, *29 Locks* is both heart-rending, and compulsive reading. Donny tells his own story and tells it in the voice of a fifteen-year-old Younger* from Hackney. Born into single parent poverty, the son of an absentee St. Lucian father and a drug-addicted English mother, Donny has been fostered many times and by many people while his mother is in rehab. Whatever endz* is 'home' for him over his fifteen years, he is always at the periphery of gang culture, and once he is a teenager his involvement in crime increases, often unwittingly. Finally fostered twenty-nine locks away from his East London home, along the canal from Hertford to King's Cross, Donny decides to return to his endz*, along with a girl he has met, who is determined to take up the offer of a modelling trial.

Garrard knows her subject inside out and demonstrates great empathy with the conditions and lifestyle she describes. Donny speaks Multicultural London English, and readers unfamiliar with this are able to consult the brief explanation and Glossary provided for words like Younger and endz. The decision to restrict the quantity and content of swearing ensures that schools and teachers will not consider the novel inappropriate for lower secondary readers.

This is an outstanding, truly unmissable read.

Bridget Carrington

Baby Teeth

Meg Grehan, pub. Little Island Books

A reviewer cited on the front cover of this book wrote: “Grehan’s verse flows like water.” When I started reading out loud this novel in verse, I felt more like I was listening to water continuously dripping from a tap. Meg Grehan’s writing at first resembles more chopped up prose than poetry, as she does not write metrically. Nonetheless, her verse does have a rhythm overall, a syncopate one. If at the start I felt like I was breathing with hiccups, by the end I learnt how to skip over the white spaces in between the words and get carried away by a flow that surely matches very well the thoughts of its YA audience.

Interrupted, conflictual, intense, passionate, focused on the self but at the same time attempting to reach ‘the other’.

Immy and Claudia are in love as never before. The character of Immy, a vampire girl, embodies teens’ concerns. Love as possessing, love as letting go, self-acceptance, independence, the joy and the suffering emerging from new and old relationships. It is amazing how the voices in this novel break through the page without being announced. There are almost no descriptions, very little setting, as if this could have happened anywhere, anytime. The whiteness of the pages functions like a canvas on which the characters’ voices appear and disappear. Sometimes they are loud, other times they fade away.

I found in Immy, the main character, the same tensions that I had in myself as a teenager. The same desire to love and run away at the same time. A similar like and dislike for myself, and for others. This novel succeeds in digging deep down until reaching a shared level of consciousness and offering it to its readers so they can see themselves, vampires or not. This aspect draws it near poetry, despite its rejection of a more formal (and rhythmical) style. It is expressive, strong, and compelling. It is poetry as seen from the eyes of a teenager.

Francesca Magnabosco

Defy the Night

Brigid Kemmerer, pub. Bloomsbury Children’s Books

Tessa is a thief, working with Wes, stealing Moonflower petals, trying to evade the king and his cruel brother, hoping to get the medicines, the elixir that they are mixing to those who need it the most.

Sickness is stalking the streets, when only the rich can afford a cure what can the poor do but rely on the goodness of a pair of masked outlaws? Echoes of Robin Hood may be resounding in your mind right now but this is far from that kind of tale. Yes, Tessa and Wes are masked outlaws risking death if they are caught, but there is more to it than that. All too soon Tessa finds herself caught in a tangled

web, layer after layer of intrigue drawing her to the castle, into the hands of the King, the Prince, their advisors and into the dark heart of a kingdom that may be destroyed unless she can convince them of her abilities, her skills and her willingness to help. Tessa did not want to ever find herself in the castle helping those who she sees destroying her world but as she is drawn into the web of power she learns that there is far more going on than she was ever aware of and that all she thought was true is about to explode in front of her eyes.

It didn't take me long to read this one, it was just too good to put down. From page 1 when we first meet the masked outlaws there is interest and intrigue. As the story develops, the plot thickens and the tension builds. Brigid Kemmerer is a masterful storyteller; she knows how to grab the attention of her reader and keep them there. It worked for me. This story is a masterpiece. I highly recommend it.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

The Five Clues: Don't Doubt the Rainbow

Anthony Kessel, pub. Crown House Publishing

Mum had been dead for a year. Edie, withdrawn, struggles to sleep, suffering nightmares regularly. Her younger brother Eli closes his eyes and runs up the flight of stairs to avoid seeing the family photographs. Their dad turns to drink and turns up the volume on the television so his children do not hear him crying. Edie is therefore bewildered when she finds a note from mum in her jacket. Mum's death was not accidental. It was murder.

Five Clues is a tense murder mystery. Edie's Mum, a successful human rights lawyer, fearful of her death, left a trail of five clues. Edie finds the first clue, but must work out the answer to reveal where she can find the next clue and so on, undercovering as she goes, her mum's final case: a corporate human rights abuse in Vietnam by a UK medical research company. Despite her mum's death, Edie seems unconcerned about her own safety and naively makes herself a person of interest, hunted by a man with a facial scar. Obsessed at first with solving the clues, Edie alienates and isolates herself further from her best friend and family, before realising this is something she must do with the help of others.

The five clues are a great device, creating tension as it takes time for Edie to work out each one. Each one is linked to memories of her mum. Edie also takes the initiative to conduct further research, willing to take risks to gain access to possible witnesses under false pretences and break-in to a CCTV control room. Unbeknown to Edie, the stakes are high, and an ex-SAS hitman is on the payroll to do a company's dirty work of discouraging Edie's pursuit of justice. There is also the potential of a global public health threat, which Edie is exposed to.

The story is a thrilling David versus Goliath battle, threatening to engulf Edie and her family, and like her mum, one that will silence her forever. It is only her tenacity and courage that keeps her fighting to uncover the truth and allow her to confront her pain and sorrow.

Simon Barrett

Every Line of You

Naomi Gibson, pub. Chicken House

This edge-of-your-seat thriller truly earns the tag of unputdownable (my favourite quality in a good book). *Every Line of You* tells the story of Lydia, a teen who is struggling with her identity. Nothing new there, many teenagers struggle, feeling that life isn't fair or easy, not being able to understand why the world is against them, just desperately wanting to fit in and be happy. But Lydia's story goes beyond the clichéd teen angst because, frankly, she's had a rougher time of it than most. After her brother died in a tragic accident her father left, her best friend ex-communicated her, and her mother fell into such a deep depression that she barely acknowledges her existence.

Despite all the obstacles in her way Lydia manages harness her negative energy and throw it into her hobby, programming computers- something that started as a pastime to share with her dad, and which has escalated into her obsession. But she isn't just some kid playing video games, creating a blog, and having a go with a bit of HTML, Lydia has created a sentient being within her code - Henry.

With such hefty subjects being tackled, such as grief and depression, it would be easy for this book to become rather miserable. I am happy to say that it is anything but. Naomi Gibson manages to create a book which is super uplifting and just the thing any teen, or adult for that matter, struggling with their identity would love. While the obvious teen girl plot points of love and friendship run through this book it is really refreshing to see a girl who embraces science and computers, shaking off the stereotypes of what young women should aspire to be.

Whether you love, or loath, computers I am sure you will take something positive away from this read. I look forward to seeing what else Gibson has to offer.

Rosie Cammish Jones

Hide and Seek

Robin Scott-Elliot, pub. Everything with Words

It is 1942 when they arrive for her parents. Amelie Dreyfus, thirteen years old, hides in her mother's wardrobe. Her parents are gone and she has to fend for herself in a Paris occupied by the Nazis.

Amelie and her parents are Jewish and as such are persecuted by the occupying forces. She becomes part of the Resistance. Her story takes her to Britain and back to Paris again.

Robin Scott-Elliot, a sports journalist for 25 years, was inspired by real events to write this story and real people such as Vera Atkins and Maurice Buckmaster are included in the narrative. Scott-Elliot's text rings true in other ways. There is a real sense of time and place in the Paris that he presents to us and also in the harsh Scottish countryside. Amelie is a rounded and believable character. We watch her grow up ahead of her time.

This would be an excellent text for teachers who need to introduce their students to the Holocaust. Scott-Elliot offers an authentic portrayal but one that is not too brutal.

It would suit the Key Stage 2 or Key Stage 3 reader. There is, in any case, some excellent storytelling here.

Gill James

Gill James' *Girl in a Smart Uniform* is published by Chapelton Books

The Hideaway

Pam Smy, pub. Pavilion Books

Billy is aged thirteen. He and his mother lived happily together for years until the day his mother meets Jeff.

At first the newcomer seemed personable and friendly. It seemed that Billy's mother was happy in the new relationship. Gradually however things began to change. Both Billy and his mother had to become obsessively tidy for fear of upsetting Jeff. Mother was not allowed to do anything without first seeking permission from the all-powerful Jeff. Billy eventually grew tired of the new arrangements, on the eve of Halloween. So tired that Billy decided it was time for him to run away from home and to conceal himself in an old Second World War pillbox where no one was likely to find him. The pillbox was next door to a graveyard.

Smy's story unfolds with her description of the police search for Billy and its unexpected consequences. Questions are raised as the narrative continues. What else might the police discover while they are searching for the missing boy?

The power of Smy's book lies in its meticulous description of the emotions surrounding domestic violence and the detailed steps that might be taken in the hope of resolving such a situation. The book

is beautifully illustrated, containing one section that is deliberately wordless, thus refuting the proposition sometimes advanced that illustrated books are only appropriate for younger readers.

The novel also depicts a moving cross-generational friendship.

Rebecca Butler

Kaleidoscope

Brian Selznick, pub. Scholastic Press

‘The whisper of a memory came to me, a conversation he and I were going to have the next day. It was a conversation about the ocean, and whether he wanted to stay or go, I could not remember.’

The opening pages of *Kaleidoscope*, the latest illustrated novel from Brian Selznick, tells us a fairy tale. On the morning of his thirteenth birthday, a boy sets off across the ocean with his best friend. Their voyage takes them to the land of the Moon, where they join a centuries-long fight to save night, sleep, dreams and darkness. But when it is finally time to leave, the boy must leave his friend behind. How he copes with this separation – from grief and loss through to acceptance – becomes the story of the book.

Selznick approaches his subject in a formally inventive, if rather curious way, with a series of fantastical tales which seem designed to be read not literally but rather as gesturing at a mood or a kind of “spiritual” significance. These feature a number of recurring symbols, characters and motifs, which are configured and reconfigured into new scenarios across different tales, just as the shapes seen inside a kaleidoscope transform with each turn – the central conceit hinted at by the title. As this would suggest, there isn’t a clear narrative, though there is a gradual sense of progression through emotional states as initial agonizing loss morphs into acceptance and gentle recollection.

At their best, individual tales take on the insistent logic and buried emotional resonance of a dream, an effect reinforced by the beautiful accompanying illustrations. Selznick has written about experimenting with visual storytelling in his previous books; here the black-and-white illustrations, often slightly grainy, seem to suggest memory, and in hidden, ivy-covered doors, broken clock faces and magical islands the nostalgic locales of early twentieth-century children’s stories.

As is probably clear from this, *Kaleidoscope* is not best suited for younger children for whom the structure may be too elliptical to be pleasurable (though the illustrations would certainly fascinate). Still, for sensitive YA readers and Selznick’s many adult fans, there may not be the more universal narrative pleasures of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* or *The Marvels*, but there is a lot to enjoy.

Olivia Parry

Little Thieves

Margaret Owen, pub. Hodder & Stoughton

Are you familiar with the fairy tales of the Grimm Brothers? I tend to think of them more as folk tales for they do tend to have rather grizzly endings for their characters. Margaret Owen has taken the story of the *Goose Girl* and made it her own in the masterpiece of storytelling that is *Little Thieves*. This is YA fantasy at its very best and it is the perfect read for the coming Autumn months, maybe even a Christmas gift. Be warned though, fantasy, yes. Thriller, yes. Gentle, no.

Vanja Schmidt knows that a gift is never freely given and that includes the gift of a mother's love. The problem is for Vanja that the gift of love she was given was a gift like no other for her adopted mothers are none other than Death and Fortune and although they kept them with her for as long as they were able there came a point when she had to be left to the human world once more, with a debt to pay. Vanja becomes the dutiful servant of Princess Gisele and life is perhaps not ideal but it is comfortable.

Death and Fortune decide it is time for their loving, motherly care to be paid for. They call in their debt. Vanja in turn decides that she will evade the demand, she will steal her future back and she will steal Giselle's charmed life for herself. Essentially the girls swap places but the story weaves a more tangled and twisted web than that and an enchanted string of pearls, a jewel thief, the treasures of the nobility all intertwine to aid, abet and ultimately ... well that is for you to learn. Reading this tale will reveal, perhaps, how they all combine to leave Vanja slowly turning into a jewel after crossing the wrong god.

With just two weeks left to break the curse this is a pacey, exciting read with twists at every turn. It will keep you on your toes, have you gasping for breath and being completely immersed in this simply wonderful irreverent and fresh fairy tale.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

The Memory Thieves

Darren Simpson, pub. Usborne

This is a gripping, thought-provoking YA novel that explores the desire to avoid painful memories.

Cyan is a teen who has been at Elsewhere Sanctuary for some time, although he, like everyone else there, has no idea how long. They have signed away their right to know who, when, and where they are, in return for 'Lethe treatment' which will make them forget whatever drove them there. Each inmate is named after a colour shade and wears a recording of an oath they made on arrival, pledging

their desperate desire to forget. It is the last emotion they will truly feel as they live in Elsewhere, where the mealtimes, clothes and rooms change in a shifting, disorientation-pattern. Pills and strobe treatments are administered by the ironically named, Dr Haven, as he adjusts their ability to remember.

All is far from well in this controlled, pain-free existence and Cyan becomes aware of his treatment's flaws and the convenience of some teens being 'withdrawn' from the programme, never to be seen again. With the arrival of Jonquil, who tries to share her feelings about what has happened to her, knowledge becomes dangerous and Cyan must fight to remember.

Simpson creates a tangible sense of emptiness in his masterful descriptions of place. The sanctuary is ship-like in a vast desert. The bleached whale bones and abandoned sea vessels in this barren wasteland are a playground for Cyan and his friends, Teal and Ruby, to play risky games in order to feel something again. This illuminating metaphor reaches its satisfying conclusion in the final moments of the novel. It may have you in tears.

Chilling and beautifully written, this book offers readers an immersive, and ultimately therapeutic exploration of the need to face our trauma and learn how to survive it.

Saira Archer

Not If I Can Help It

Carolyn Mackler, pub. Scholastic

Eleven-year-old Willa has Sensory Processing Disorder, which makes her extremely over-sensitive to the taste and touch of everyday things, such as food and clothes. She is also unable to cope with change. Ashamed of her condition, Willa works hard to manage it and keep it a secret; even her best friend, Ruby, doesn't know. When Willa's father and Ruby's mother announce that have been secretly dating and intend to get married, Willa's life is blown apart.

The story is set in New York City; some of the vocabulary and cultural references may be unfamiliar but the warmth of the central characters and the strength of the writing carries the story through. While her disability is a rare one, Willa's predicament and response to it include familiar themes: anger at the insecurity and loss of control; the betrayal of a parent who has kept an important secret; isolation and despair; fears of being labelled a freak; longing to reset history.

These are experiences that will resonate with many children who must navigate their way through the minefield of parental choices which have momentous consequences for family life. Some of the themes may be heavy, but Mackler has a light touch and there is plenty of humour and optimism.

Willa herself never loses her spark. She is surrounded by the love and support she needs and there is little doubt that her struggle will not pull her down for ever.

Above all, this is a hopeful, joyous story about family, friendship and securing your place in an uncertain world.

Yvonne Coppard

Once Upon a Broken Heart

Stephanie Garber, pub. Hodder & Stoughton

Evangeline has grown up in the curiosity shop, around hopes and dreams, with happy ever afters never far from her eyes and ears. It is no surprise then that a happy ever after is what she wishes for herself more than anything in the world. Her happy ever after is Luc. In her fairy tale mind, her magical world she and Luc are going to get married and live their very own happily ever after. That is until Evangeline discovers that Luc is engaged and about to be married to her stepsister. Convinced that there is something underhand going on Evangeline sets out to change the course of her destiny, and hopefully Luc's, to bring them back together.

It is said that you should never make a deal with a Fate. The Fates live by their own rules. For humans the rules are never make a deal with more than one Fate, always promise less than you can give and on no account ever fall in love with a Fate. Evangeline is offered a deal in return for three kisses. Just three, she thinks that surely no harm can come of that. Evangeline is about to find out that her world can be turned upside down in just a moment, that there is magic, there are handsome charming princes and there can be happily ever-afters but that they all come with a price tag.

Stephanie Garber has woven a dark and mysterious fairy tale. Reading it there are very much elements of and tropes from well-known tales and there are her own clever plot twists making this a dark, mysterious tale, a sweeping magical adventure and possibly the greatest tragedy you have ever read. Powerful storytelling that will have you guessing, gripped and astounded. A brilliant read that I very much recommend.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

The Song that Sings Us

Nicola Davies, illus. Jackie Morris, pub. Firefly Press

“When animals talk, it’s time humans listened.” This beautiful book is the work of an ideal partnership – Nicola Davies, author of many picture and information books drawing on her zoology

background and love of the natural world, and Jackie Morris, Greenaway-winning illustrator of *The Lost Words* among many other titles. Although Nicola Davies is best known for her picture books, she returns to longer fiction in this epic adventure with a strong environmental theme.

Set in an alternative world, the story centres on an issue that's all too relevant to our own: the destruction of the natural world by those who readily sacrifice its beauty, diversity and wildness for power and wealth. The ruthless Automators aim to drive all citizens into cities, away from land, rivers, and farms, with the promise that consistency of life will be guaranteed, away from the vagaries of nature. "They (the people) must be made to understand that animals and plants are resources to be owned and used; that they have no rights. The Listeners and their filthy hocus-pocus stand in the way of progress." This dislike of animal life is so great that those who are Listeners – able to tune in to animal minds and communicate with them – can be denounced, imprisoned, and brainwashed.

The Automators fail to realise the strength of a Gaia-like network in which all living creatures communicate through song and thought transference. Central to this are Harlon, Ash and Xeno and their mother Toren, linked to the resistance movement Green Thorn; the family lives peacefully on a mountainside until Automators burst in, setting fire to their home. Told by Toren to snowboard to safety, the three siblings become separated, each at some point in the story captured by the Automators. Their quest is to seek a remote island where they believe golden lines connect the entire living world. It's this island the Automators plan to destroy with a quasi-nuclear weapon, and here all the main characters converge.

Both Ash and Xeno are Listeners, Xeno with an affinity with birds: "It fills her up: the shape of wind, the space between one wingbeat and the next, the wisdom of the flock ... Eggs in nests of cliffs and trees, white in dark burrows, blue like the eye of the sky or mottle-blotched like captured bits of cloud." Doada, the conflicted leader of the Automators, thinks his battle is won when Xeno is captured; but he underestimates the power and resilience of creatures of all kinds.

The Song That Sings Us is a captivating eco-fable with enough danger and action to please lovers of action adventure but also with the lyricism and wonder that comes from Nicola Davies' deep love of the natural world; her writing often combines a zoologist's knowledge with a poet's eye and ear. Jackie Morris's illustrations, in her unmistakable style, are the perfect match.

Linda Newbery

Linda Newbery's *This Book is Cruelty Free: Animals and Us* is published by Pavilion

The Raven Heir

Stephanie Burgis, pub. Bloomsbury

The Raven Heir immediately grips the reader into a beautifully constructed magical world full of interesting and realistic characters that feel like friends. Cordelia our head-strong and determined protagonist has always been pulled to the wider world outside her castle, so when a mysterious army turns up on her doorstep, she is quick to investigate. However, her actions have a drastic consequence on her family upturning their world forever. Over the course of the book, Cordelia, finally, starts to uncover the secrets that have been kept from her for so many years as well as unexpected truths that not only change her life but her relationship with her family forever.

Burgis writes a captivating novel full of enchantments, suspense, and familial love. Her inspiration draws from the manipulation experienced by children during the War of the Roses in the 15th Century. The influence of the constantly warring country at this time is very prominent in *The Raven Heir*. Burgis' wonderful writing helps the reader feel fully immersed in the novel, through the gorgeous descriptions of the world and well-developed characters. In particular, the three triplets each have their own distinctive identities to be enjoyed by the reader and together using their differences to their advantage, the triplets, Rosalind, Giles and Cordelia overcome the many difficulties facing them during the novel.

The book teaches the importance of honesty, teamwork and resilience. However, the most significant theme in this novel is the importance of family. Burgis' key message is about how family is not necessarily formed through blood but rather "loyalty and love." This is a direct comment to the constant wars between families in the novel but is also an essential reminder of the beauty of family and how love is the most important thing.

This is a book to be enjoyed by readers who love fantasy, found family, and drama.

Elinor Hurry

Wildlord

Philip Womack, pub. Little Island

Tom is not looking forward to the summer holidays. With both his parents dead and his guardian in Hong Kong, Tom remains at school under the watchful eyes of his house master. So when an invitation to go to his Uncle's farm arrives, he's off. Tom vaguely remembers his family owning property in Suffolk and the name of the farm, Mundham. He's sure no-one ever mentioned an Uncle James.

If the journey to Mundham farm is strange, then the farm is stranger. Shimmering in the sunlight, even the building seems to change, expanding into the ethereal. Then there are Tom's two house companions. Silver-haired and eyed Kit refuses to answer his questions, while the more flamboyant Zita, beguilingly fails to answer them. Although rarely seen, Uncle James Swinton is a brooding

presence throughout the house, magnanimous in his hospitality, but fierce when angry. Tom soon discovers that underneath the day-to-day of farm life, there is a much darker, magical history of entrapment and cruelty.

The author Philip Womack is skilful at creating suspense. Tom slowly learns the histories of Kit and Zita, who are much older than they look. Gradually the extracts from the diary of Margaret Ravenswood begin to make sense, and the Wildlord himself, Rohenga, appears, although his true nature can only be guessed. Uncle James however is the greatest enigma. Any suggestions that James' powers are diminishing seem premature and the depth of his malice seem unfathomable. Tom's best efforts to resist his Uncle only conspire to make the situation worse. Essentially, prisoners, any possibility to escape for Tom, Kit and Zita appears futile.

Central to the story is great power. When Uncle James offers Tom a Faustian deal, exchanging his freedom to share his magic, Tom is tempted. It seems power has not corrupted Uncle James, simply magnified his propensity to control and inflict harm on those who get in his way: a true psychopath. It is therefore a question of whether Tom possesses the strength of character to do what is necessary.

Wildlord is a dark mystery in the remote Suffolk countryside, imbued with magic and fairy lore.

Simon Barrett

Non-Fiction Books

A Day in the Life of a Caveman, a Queen and Everything in Between: History as You've Never Seen it Before

Mike Barfield, illus. Jess Bradley, pub. Michael O'Mara Books

Not since Winston Churchill produced his *History of the English Speaking Peoples* has so much history been condensed into so brief a space. Churchill took five volumes whereas Mike Barfield has covered the whole of human experience from the time we learnt to stand on two legs to the present reality of a warming world in 111 pages. It is a tour de force AND it is illustrated.

Now, I am not generally a fan of graphic history but I doubt whether so much information could have been delivered in any other format without boring the pants off the reader. Unlike Churchill, Barfield, deigns to cover the history of non-English speakers and we are treated to snippets about a wide variety of countries, people and cultures from Rapa Nui (aka Easter Island) to Norway and from Great Zimbabwe to Japan. I grew up on 'white man's' history and now I long to know more about the Valdivia Culture of Ecuador (1500BCE) or the reign of Wu Zetian, China's only woman emperor.

The authors do not make this history all about war or religion but give plenty of page space to economic and cultural development whether it be in China (210 BCE), 11th century Korea, the Incas in the 1600s or Russia under Peter the Great. They reflect the histories of different peoples by referring to art, artefacts, writing, drama, science and political thought. The 'autobiographies' such as 'A day in the life of two bronze bowls' are particularly entertaining. I like this emphasis; it makes the subsequent eradication of many cultures by European colonial powers even more poignant.

It is inevitable that I disagree with the authors about some of their omissions. I would like to have seen more about culture in Africa. It is a big continent. There could be a place for the libraries and scholars of Timbuktu for example, or a mention of the Kingdom of Benin (and its looted treasures). The Middle East is short-changed too. But I quibble! I should also say that this book is not just a cultural ramble through the ages, there is plenty about 'causes and effects' to add ballast: exploration is twinned with exploitation, inventions have both good and bad consequences.

Jess Bradley deserves her own tribute. The illustrations are perfect; they are copious, lighten the load and are genuinely humorous. They are reminiscent of Nick Sharratt's (the *Daisy* books) cartoons and are appealing to children of all ages. I heartily recommend this book to all children of age eight and above.

Katherine Wilson

A History of the World in 25 Cities

Tracey Turner and Andrew Donkin, illus. Libby VanderPloeg, pub. Nosy Crow

A History of the World in 25 Cities is a non-fiction picture book that explores major cities of the world through a series of interesting facts and stunningly illustrated maps. Created in collaboration with the British Museum, the book explores how people have shaped cities, and how those cities have simultaneously shaped societal history throughout the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, and the Americas.

Each city is spread across four pages, with two double-page spreads: the first half showing a detailed, illustrated map; and the second half detailing a 'Life in...' factsheet for each city. It is a very colourful, very detailed and informative book, and will likely help children with their homework. The maps help to picture the scene and show the individual layouts of each city at a particular time in their histories.

The cities also appear in chronological order: for example, the Ancient Egyptian city of Memphis is illustrated around the year 1200 BCE; and, later in the book, the Italian city of Venice is pictured as it would have been in 1450 AD. The facts about family life and societies in each city are fascinating, although the maps would have been better with a bit less detail, as they could be off-putting to some readers.

It is an interesting book and will appeal not just to children, but people of all ages. As well as ancient cities, it also explores the cities of today and tomorrow, and what our lives could be like in the future. In this way, the book feels like it could serve as a fun introduction to further studies, and with Christmas approaching, *A History of the World in 25 Cities* would make a perfect present.

Chris J Kenworthy

The Biggest Footprint: Eight Billion Humans. One Clumsy Giant.

Rob and Tom Sears, pub. Canongate

Who, or maybe we should be asking what, has made the biggest footprint on or is that in the world. Questions arise before we even open the book and the subtitle tells us that there have been eight billion (yes that is a very big number) humans and only one clumsy giant. Can we blame a clumsy giant for making the biggest footprint? What is this book about to reveal to us?

Rob and Tom Sears are bothers, author-illustrator brothers, a great partnership and one that shines through as soon as we open the book. This is a book about people. Humans. Breathing, thinking, eating and of course fidgeting humans. Humans don't ever sit still ... neither do they act along. Rob and Tom Sears have mooshed them together for this book, yes all 8 billion of them into one, that one

giant we have already pondered over. Why? Because this one giant represents humanity and it is this giant that is beginning to realise, to recognize what its living, breathing, eating and fidgeting has done to the world it inhabits and how it might go about making some changes, for the better of it and for the better of us all.

This is a book that wants to give us information, information that we can use. Stats and facts abound, the illustration helps enormously to place the facts, to picture them, to understand some of them and the text? It is fun, it doesn't go above the head, it is approachable. The brothers want this book to be understood and enjoyed by all its readers. So let me leave you with some facts that may just tempt you to pick it up for yourself...

... Statistics go in one ear and out the other.

The titanic was 269m long, a humpback whale 14m long, the average depth of the red sea 450m. The world has about 25 times more giraffe than tigers ...

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Cats Eyes and Dog Whistles: The Seven Senses of Humans and Other Animals

Cathy Evans, illus. Becky Thorns, pub. Cicada Books

Just a few days ago I was reading a design blog on Haptics in smartphones based on the language, so vital and essential to humans, of touch. Here I am, reading this adorably illustrated book for kids, which teaches them on what goes behind the ability to respond to and communicate with senses in themselves and those present in their furry friends!

Author and veterinarian Cathy Evans along with illustrator Becky Thorns has brought out this beautiful book for young readers on the biology of our five senses, with colourful diagrams pointing to the details on how we see, smell, eat, feel, and hear. Full of scientific terms with glossary and fun facts; your inquisitive kiddies will love the combination of colours and information.

Here are some myth breaking questions from the book –

Did you know that not all smell comes through the nostrils?

Did you know that you can understand a person by the smell they produce during different emotional states!

Did you know what 'Proprioception' or 'Interoception' or 'Magnetoreception' are?...I certainly didn't until now! Feeling enlightened I continued with the book and well, what can I say? Fascinating, enlightening and now I feel that I would like to know more.

This book is a great way to introduce growing kids to the science of the body in living beings. Good for kids aged 9-14, include this mini repository of amazing facts in their library to let them explore and learn in a fun way!

Ishika Tiwari

Everything Under the Sun: A Curious Question for every Day of the Year

Molly Oldfield, pub. Ladybird books

Everything under the Sun means a great many things, and when Molly Oldfield asked children to send in their questions for a podcast of the same name – *Everything under the Sun* – she received questions about a great many things from children everywhere. This book is the result of this podcast, answering children’s questions, with the help of many experts.

The book is divided into the twelve months and there is a question every day. At the beginning of the month there is a double page listing the question for each day, allowing readers to read a question and answer every day or selectively read the question that interests them most. Some questions are perfect for that month: ‘Why do we shiver?’ in December. Sometimes there is a sequence of questions, such as about dinosaurs. Penguins, gorillas and ice-cream are also very popular! Often questions are unconnected, for example, ‘Why does an octopus have three hearts?’, which is also delightful as children so often remember weird facts, but are curious why. Sometimes Molly Oldfield and the experts may not know the answer, however the facts and our knowledge may change, and sometimes the answer is a matter of opinion. ‘How do Mermaids wee?’ is pure speculation based on how fish wee. Moreover, there is lots of additional information that simply begs for a follow up question.

The explanations are sapient, providing an accessible answer to some really difficult and complex questions. For example, ‘Where do babies come from?’ or ‘How are identical twins made?’, using scientific terms, in a clear and concise way, but adults might need to help out. While the artwork is colourful and appealing, the illustrations do not help with understanding the question. In the example of these two questions about babies, the double spread is decorated with children of different ethnicities appearing out of flowers with blue sperm swimming around!

Everything under the Sun is a brilliant collaboration, involving all the children submitting questions and those included in the book are credited, Molly Oldfield and a number of named experts as well as the beautiful illustrations by Ladybird books, making such a fascinating and engaging book.

This book presents genius answers to genuine questions children ask.

Simon Barrett

The History of Everywhere: All the Stuff that You never knew Happened at the Same Time

Philip Parker, illus. Liz Kay, pub. Walker Books

The History of Everywhere is a fascinating book that covers specific time periods and connections via double-page world maps with illustrations and concise bites of information.

Starting in 4000BC and bringing us almost up to date with its end in 2001, the reader is invited to investigate first civilisations, first Empires, the Classical World and new kingdoms, new beginnings, the Age of Enlightenment, the World at War and more. Each time period that is introduced to the reader focuses on more than one specific area and time period of the world, allowing us to compare what was happening at the same time period in different parts of the world. For example, for 4000 – 1000BC we are introduced to the Norte Chico people in South America, Stonehenge, the pyramids, the Bantu migration from West to Central Africa, the Indus Valley civilisation, the Shang Dynasty and Aborigines. A fascinating set of comparisons result.

Each section provides us with an overview and a list of the key events, and each of the following pages are visually attractive and clearly presented. In addition to these vast periods of time we are also given areas of specific focus such as the philosophers of Ancient Greece, the Silk Roads of China, the Samurai of Japan and Mughal art and buildings.

This is an excellent book for introducing a wide range of diverse cultures and their role in the history of the world, and it is interesting to see the connections between civilisations as well as who lived, and what events occurred, at the same time. Fascinating for a range of subjects across the curriculum as well as for the home library.

Barbara Band

How to be a Global Citizen: Be Informed. Get Involved.

Sreshtha Battacharya, pub. Dorling Kindersley

For readers from 11 years old upwards, DK introduces young people to situations which have taken inspiration from teenagers themselves, such as female education activist Malala Yousafzai, LGBTQ+ rights activist, Jazz Jennings, and environmentalist, Greta Thunberg. Realizing that aspiring activists and young community leaders need information to be responsible citizens and change-makers in their communities, this book offers extensive advice and information in seven easy-on-the-eye chapters.

Firstly, it urges readers to examine their own feelings, relationships, values and well-being, encouraging them to know themselves thoroughly before they can usefully help others, and become global citizens. The book moves on to show us how to tackle big issues and find our own place in society, and demonstrating a multitude of opinions which can lead to prejudice. There are careful explanations of the sources of prejudice, such as culture, equality, inclusion, discrimination, ableism, women's rights, beliefs and faiths, racism, and sexual and gender identity, and readers are encouraged to celebrate difference, and rebel against marginalisation.

Young readers will certainly be aware of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, and they are urged to become allies and empathise with those who are marginalised. There is a chapter looking at politics, and encouragement for readers to examine the different kinds of government, and then to discuss and debate different viewpoints. Each of the political systems - democracy, monarchy, oligarchy and dictatorship – is explained, as are voting, law, and particularly taxes and what they are used for. This chapter goes on to look at all kinds of injustice, and the lengths some ethnic groups are forced to go to in order to escape injustice and cruelty. Readers will be aware of environmental and climate issues, and also the necessity for safety when using the internet, and these are two excellent chapters, while the penultimate one suggests the causes in which readers might consider becoming involved.

Finally, we have a short chapter specifically on the UK, and pivotal moments in social history. A glossary, a list of organisations who can provide support, and an excellent index complete a fascinating and important resource for middle grade and older readers.

Bridget Carrington

How Was That Built?: The Stories Behind Awesome Structures

Roma Agrawal, illus. Katie Hickey, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

This book comes from such a credible source of expertise that even before opening the covers I was pretty sure that any library should have a copy and any budding architect or engineer would appreciate it. The author is an internationally renowned award-winning structural engineer who also works to promote engineering to under-represented groups, was awarded an MBE for services to engineering, has a best-selling adult title - *Built: The Hidden Stories behind our Structures* and worked as an engineer on The Shard building which just happens to be one of the featured buildings in this richly detailed and intriguing book. On opening the book and delving into each of these buildings I was not disappointed.

Over fifteen chapters, most are three double page spreads long, a different building from around the world is explored in detail as an example of how engineers and architects have worked to solve the

problems of how to build flat, tall, long, a dome, clean, strong, across, stable, watertight, underground, moving things, on ice, in the sea, in outer space, and into the future.

There is such a wealth of themes and ideas explored across the chapters. From how the problems have been dealt with historically such as how the ancient Persians engineered water in their desert climate to the history of the brick. From focusing on key people such as Ada Lovelace or Joseph Bazalgette to looking at friction, gravity, and forces of nature. From different types of bridges to the development of lifts. With a glossary, detailed illustrations of buildings (which are more painterly and naiver in style than architectural), lovely descriptive explanations, and plenty of experiments and activities to try at home this is a wonderful book for both those interested in the subjects and those trying to understand them.

Natalie J. McChrystal Plimmer

I Am an Artist

Kertu Sillaste, trans. Adam Cullen, pub. Graffeg

John is an artist; he thinks and draws and paints and sculpts. Sometimes for him art is a game, sometimes it's a puzzle and sometimes it's a surprise. Art is not always easy, but John is brave and always tries again when things don't work out as planned. What a great premise for a book and a wonderful inspiration for children – budding artists, bussing anything in fact!

Originally published in Estonian and translated by Adam Cullen, *I Am An Artist* is a beautiful non-fiction picture book that considers all things art, where the good ideas come from, and what it means to be creative. It helps us understand that art is open to interpretation. Inspiration can come from anywhere, but that art comes from within. It helps us to understand that we can all be creative and that creativity, just as art, comes in many forms, shapes and sizes. That is, as us, is unique and different for us all. Nothing is lost in translation in this book.

I enjoyed the way Sillaste captures the vulnerability an artist feels when sharing work that is personal to them. For this reason, and because it is simply a wonderful book this story would be a great platform to talk to your young artist about how they connect with their own creations.

Sillaste's use of illustrations and collage, feels fun and fresh. Perfectly capturing the creative process, the images jump off the page in a riot of colour and movement. It's just joyful. This is a book that will appeal to adults and children, inspiring us all to be artists.

Abby Mellor

If I Ran the Country: An Introduction to Politics where YOU make the Decisions

Rich Knight, illus. Allan Sanders, pub. Wren & Rook

An introduction to politics with the premise of the reader becoming the leader of a country and having to make decisions regarding running it this is a clever book perfect for curious children who might wonder what politics is and what a politician does. They may even be considering being one themselves, this book provides some great discussion points around the concept of that most fantastic of questions: “What would I do if I ran the county.” Maybe some adults should read it too?

Beginning with what type of government to have if you were to run the country, the book takes you through selecting your team and working with other countries, what kind of country you want, what things you are going to stand for, how to be fair to everyone and the big issues you will need to deal with. Although this book deals with, what could be considered, large and complicated concepts, it does it in such a way as to make them interesting, informative, and accessible to its intended, younger audience.

There is good use made of sub-headings and varied fonts, and the activities and questions prompt further exploration of the topics. Numerous black and white illustrations add a touch of humour. This is a clever way of providing an overview of what could be a rather dry subject. A glossary and index would have been useful although the chapter headings give some detail about content. Aimed at 9 – 12 year olds, many older readers (including adults) would find this book instructive.

A perfect addition for the school library but also to engage with young people interested in politics.

Barbara Band

Ready, Steady, School

Marianne Dubuc, trans. Sarah Ardizzone, pub. Book Island

Montreal based, award winning illustrator, Marianne Dubuc has created the perfect book for young readers heading back to school or indeed to school for the first time. Universal in its appeal, this book could be read in any country by any age or gender of student.

It is a story and a fact book. It is a book with a main character who is delightfully gender-neutral in their red hat, and simple outfit. Pom is the name of this character and Pom has a bag packed and is ready to check out what school looks like for the animals, which will provide vital clues as to what school might be like for Pom. Turtles, sloths, bears and hedgehogs are on their way, bags packed, excitement and nerves jangling together.

This detailed and delightfully illustrated book has so much to read and enjoy with glimpses into classrooms of all shapes and sizes. You can't help but turn each page with anticipation to see where Pom will visit next and what it will look, sound like. The attention to detail is exquisite and I feel a parent will get as much from reading this and pointing out those small details to their child, as the child will.

I can imagine this book being pulled off the shelf, time and time again as school approaches, and then again once school has started to make comparisons. Book Island books never disappoint in highlighting the immeasurable talent of creatives living around the world.

Erin Hamilton

Sex Ed: An Inclusive Teenage Guide to Sex and Relationships

School of Sexuality Education, illus. Evie Karkera, pub. Walker Books

Informative and inclusive, this book is the ultimate guide to sex and relationships for teenagers.

Covering a variety of topics from consent to gender and sexuality, relationships to reproductive and sexual health, this book really does cover everything. It attempts to answer all the questions that a teenager may have, Essential chapters about online life and body image include information which is incredibly relevant and helpful to supporting young people as they navigate their way through the challenges of modern-day perceptions which can be damaging without prior knowledge and context.

This book is fantastic if you are a parent or an educator and will help you get up to speed with all of the correct terminology needed to guide young people with sex and relationships. The layout of this book is well thought-out, it has the reader in mind and is filled with 'Useful term bubbles' sharing key vocabulary, 'Myth versus reality' boxes sharing key truths, 'Did you know?' boxes giving interesting facts, 'Consider' boxes providing conversation points for discussions or reflections, 'Tips and tricks' sharing activities to try in real life, and 'Unembarrassable moments' where the contributors have revealed some personal experiences.

All of this, and the style of text, in addition to the age appropriate, subject appropriate illustrations, ensures the book is easy to follow and moves quickly which makes it useful to dip in and out of and refer to when needed.

The interior illustrations by Evie Karkera help with the understanding of the information written about, especially with the detailed labelled illustrations of the male and female genitalia. A timely, useful and intelligent approach to the subject of sex and relationships for teens and adults alike.

Tom Joy

The Sky

Creator H el ene Druvert, auth. Juliette Einhorn, pub. Thames and Hudson

This is a large format book packed with eclectic facts about the sky. The first double page spread is about the sky in ancient times. Other topics include Earth's atmosphere, pollination, life in the air, the wind, clouds, the weather, flying machines, space travel, the moon, eclipses. Information is presented clearly and succinctly. Typically definitions and explanations are two or three sentences long, with each topic covered in a separate space, but a number of subjects are explored in whole pages of uninterrupted text.

Numerous intriguing flaps reveal interesting details. There is lots to appeal to a curious child, such as the first parachute drop and why the hottest days of the year are referred to as the dog days of summer. Some of the text is contemplative and almost poetic: 'What is the sky? It is everything we can see above our head when we lift up our eyes. It's the roof of the heavens, infinite and untouchable, and humans have gazed upon it, studied it and longed to explore it since history began.' (The text is well translated from French but the translator is not named in the credits.) The stand-out feature of the book is its illustrations: a mix of stylised drawings, for instance of insects and birds, simple diagrams and beautiful, intricate laser cuts. Production values are very high, though it should be noted that the pages with laser cuts are fragile.

It is a shame that this very attractive book is somewhat let down by design issues that reduce its functionality and its accessibility. The absence of an index, page numbers and a contents page mean that facts can only be happened upon, not looked up. On several pages the text is overlaid on dark coloured backgrounds, making it hard to read for some children with vision or reading problems. It is however a fascinating, fact-filled book.

Anne Harding

The Ultimate Art Museum

Ferren Gipson, pub. Phaidon

The Ultimate Art Museum is a museum-in-a-book, presenting young readers with a ticket bringing together a collection of the most amazing art from across time and around the world.

Organised as a museum, the book is made up of three wings, eighteen galleries, one hundred and twenty-eight rooms, and a number of specially themed areas: a caf e, garden and hall of selfies. The first wing exhibits ancient art, beginning with the cave paintings and figurines of the Stone Age over

40,000 years ago, Tutankhamun's burial mask and mosaics from Pompei. The second wing examines art from circa 1200s onwards from around the world: Africa, Asia, Europe and the Pacific. It includes miniature paintings illustrating the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, Donatello's David, and a Chief's Chair made by the Hehe people of Tanzania. The third wing is modern and contemporary art including Hokusai's The Great Wave of Kanagawa, Dorothea Lange's iconic photograph of a migrant mother as well as Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Wrapped Coast, covering one million square feet of the Australian coastline in canvas cloth.

Curated by Ferren Gipson, an art historian, writer and presenter, the text is accessible and engaging, inviting young readers to imagine and appreciate the significance of the art and its cultural importance without avoiding controversial issues. There is further detail about specific pieces of art, reproduced in extraordinary high quality. In some examples, there are also close-ups of finer detail. Gipson also encourages young readers to become art detectives with additional inserts providing further information and an eye symbol, asking interactive questions, engaging readers about individual artwork as well as finding connections between them.

The Ultimate Art Museum demonstrates how art is much more than canvas paintings. It is architecture, carvings, fabrics, furnishings, pottery and precious metals working and a part of cultural life, not kept apart in art institutions. There is also an especially interesting and rich exploration of modern and contemporary art, again, including examples of art using many different mediums, often challenging social norms and expectations, prejudice and stereotypes.

Ultimate is an astonishing claim, but the book is astounding and a strong contender for such a title.

Simon Barrett

The World Book: Explore the Facts, Stats and Flags of Every Country

Joe Fullman and Rose Blake, pub. Welbeck

Who better to write this book than Joe Fullman with his wealth of travel and general knowledge. Not a person you would wish to invite to your local quiz night if you have a competitive streak! Suitable for 8 -12+ year olds, the appeal is not age limited.

This book is the perfect taster, an introduction to the 199 countries of the world, from the largest, Russia to the smallest, Vatican City. Of course, it depends on your analysis of what a country is. The United Nations only recognises 193. Then there are the somewhat murky areas of land referred to as dependencies or overseas territories, along with an area of the Antarctica that doesn't belong to anyone. What is more 34 new countries have emerged since 1990. Best to consider this book the worldwide state of play for 2021.

Despite not trying to be an encyclopaedia it teems with tantalizing titbits of information which entice you into its pages plus a mine of educational facts. It's actually fun to read, helping to make it all easier to remember. Small snippets of information with helpful headings encased in plenty of colourful illustrations make tempting page turning.

Where are the Federated states of Micronesia, what is the world's heaviest currency called, which country has a celebrated football team called "Les Elephants" and the largest basilica in the world? And don't say Italy. And to cap it all, which country has an underwater post office that receives and delivers waterproof postcards? Flags, capitols, currency, official language, population and land areas are all in there along with a location map.

It's a geographically fun book. It will make an impressive Christmas present for any young person interested in the world and an entertaining reference book for a school or home library. It beats computer searching. This book surprises you as you turn the pages and goads you into telling others what you have found out. "Did you know" ...?

Elizabeth Negus

Picture books

A Cat Called Waverley

Debi Giori

The Dragon with the Blazing Bottom

Beach

Hardly Haunted

Jessie Sima

It's Only One

Tracey Corderoy, illus. Tony Neal

The Last Seaweed Pie

Wenda Shurety, illus. Paddy Donnelly

The Little Wooden Robot and the Log Princess

Tom Gauld

Oh Monty!

Susannah Lloyd, illus. Nici Gregory

Pablo At The Zoo

Grainne McGuinness, illus. Michael White

The Rapping Princess

Hannah Lee, illus. Allen Fatimaharan

Ratty's Big Adventure

Lara Hawthorne

Saving Mr Hoot

Helen Stephens

Storm In A Jar

Samuel Langley-Swain, illus. Katie Cottle

That Dinosaur Has Talent!

Lily Murray, illus. Richard Merritt

Time to Move South for Winter

Clare Helen Welsh, illus. Jenny Løvlie

Too Many Bubbles: A Story about Mindfulness

Christine Peck, illus. Mags Deroma

Junior books

Adam-2

Alastair Chisholm

The Beatryce Prophecy

Kate DiCamillo, illus. Sophie Blackwell

The Book Cat

Polly Faber, illus. Clara Vulliamy

Curse of the Dearmad

Emma Mylrea, illus. Hannah Jess

Diary of an Accidental Witch

Perdita and Honor Cargill, illus. Katie Saunders

Leo's Map of Monsters: The Nightmare

Kris Humphrey, illus. Pete Williamson

Listen, Layla

Yassmin Abdel-Magied

Locked Out Lily

Nick Lake, illus. Emily Gravett

Nell and the Cave Bear

Martin Brown

Polly Pecorino: The Girl Who Rescues Animals

Emma Chichester Clarke

Rules for Vampires: Get Spooked this Halloween!

Alex Foulkes, illus. Sara Ogilvie

Tabitha Plimtock and the Edge of the World

Erika McGann, illus. Phillip Cullen

The Week at World's End

Emma Carroll

The Wild Before

Piers Torday

The Very Dangerous Sisters of Indigo McCloud

John Hearne

Young Adult books

29 Locks

Nicola Garrard

Baby Teeth

Meg Grehan

Defy the Night

Brigid Kemmerer

The Five Clues: Don't Doubt the Rainbow

Anthony Kessel

Every Line of You

Naomi Gibson

Hide and Seek

Robin Scott-Elliot

The Hideaway

Pam Smy

Kaleidoscope

Brian Selznick

Little Thieves

Margaret Owen

The Memory Thieves

Darren Simpson

Not If I Can Help It

Carolyn Mackler

Once Upon a Broken Heart

Stephanie Garber

The Song that Sings Us

Nicola Davies, illus. Jackie Morris

The Raven Heir

Stephanie Burgis

Wildlord

Philip Womack

Non-Fiction books

A Day in the Life of a Caveman, a Queen and Everything in Between: History as You've Never Seen it Before

Mike Barfield, illus. Jess Bradley

A History of the World in 25 Cities

Tracey Turner & Andrew Donkin, illus. Libby VanderPloeg

The Biggest Footprint: Eight Billion Humans. One Clumsy Giant.

Rob and Tom Sears

Cats Eyes and Dog Whistles: The Seven Senses of Humans and Other Animals

Cathy Evans, illus. Becky Thorns

Everything Under the Sun: A Curious Question for every Day of the Year

Molly Oldfield

The History of Everywhere: All the Stuff that You never knew Happened at the Same Time

Philip Parker, illus. Liz Kay

How to be a Global Citizen: Be Informed. Get Involved.

Sreshtha Battacharya

How Was That Built?: The Stories Behind Awesome Structures

Roma Agrawal, illus. Katie Hickey

I Am an Artist

Kertu Sillaste, trans. Adam Cullen

If I Ran the Country: An Introduction to Politics where YOU make the Decisions

Rich Knight, illus. Allan Sanders

Ready, Steady, School

Marianne Dubuc, trans. Sarah Ardizzone

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