



Armadillo

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Reviews, news and more
from the world of children
and young adult's books

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Picture Book Reviews

After the Fall

Dan Santat, pub. Andersen Press

Dan Santat is a New York Times bestselling author who combines classic storytelling with poignantly crafted illustrations. His book, *The adventure of Beekle: The unimaginary friend*, won the 2015 Caldecott Medal. Santat's latest picture book, *After the fall*, is a clever imagining of what happened to Humpty Dumpty after his fateful fall.

It's a disarming use of a familiar nursery rhyme character, placing it very much in the modern urban landscape, with a strong key message at its core.

Humpty, we discover, never got over his fall. Glue and bandages may have helped put him back together again, indeed we see Humpty leave the Kings County Hospital in one miraculous piece, but, he has been left with a fear of heights. This story is about what couldn't get healed and the trauma that haunts him.

Accidents do happen, is the repeated refrain, and so Humpty has tailored his life to avoid imagined dangers. Santat's haunting illustrations convey the overwhelming isolation and yearning for the things Humpty used to enjoy. He sleeps on the floor instead of his bunk bed; he forgoes his favourite breakfast cereal out of reach on the top shelf. Fear has even robbed him of his greatest joy, being close to the birds he so loves. To reach them he has to climb that wall, and since 'accidents do happen' Humpty resigns himself to watching the birds from the ground. Santat's clever use of perspective draws the reader in, so that we confront those dizzying heights just as Humpty does.

Life is not the same, until a paper aeroplane gives Humpty an idea. After some dogged persistence he fashions his own plane decorated as a magnificent bird. It flies 'like nothing could stop it' and Humpty recovers some of the happiness he felt from the days he used to sit watching the birds from his perch high up on the wall. But life is not without its continued challenges and when his plane sails over the wall, Humpty almost walks away again. Almost. He has learned that what is more frightening than the wall itself, is what his fear has caused him to lose. Humpty resolves to scale it.

Humpty's accident is a metaphor for a loss of self-confidence. His anxieties are all too familiar and relatable, but Santat's story is about the unexpectedly wonderful things that can happen as a consequence of conquering your fears. The ending is a powerful surprise (which I won't spoil here) thanks to the beautifully executed drawings, the effect of which has lingered for some days.

I discovered that *After the fall* was written by Santat as a love letter to his wife who suffered from post-partum depression and long-term anxiety: it is therefore no surprise that the message of his story is so heavily imbued with integrity and hope.

It is a touching, inspiring, exhilarating story that will most appeal to ages 4+ upwards and can be used to create some interesting discussion points with older readers around the concepts of dealing with anxiety, resilience, persistence, courage and faith. It's also a very good reminder (for adults too) that fear will hold you back from your greatest achievements.

Matilde Sazio

Along Came A Different

Tom McLaughlin, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Along came a different is the perfect book to give to any child for this is a story of unity and the joyful embracing of that which is different.

Little children don't see differences. They only see a possible new friend and the cover of *Along Came A Different* emphasizes this by showing a large red ball asking a small red apple if they can be friends. It also shows a yellow square telling a pile of books they can't be friends because they're too different and a blue triangle playing a sad blue song. Surreal and perfect. Friendship opening up the world, prejudice closing it down.

The story tells of a world of different shapes, colours and attitudes where the reds, the yellows and the blues each think their colour is the best thing ever. But none of them like each other. None of them want to be friends.

So, horrible rules are established. Stay away. No ball games. No talking to each other. No sharing and the most hateful of all, no making friends. Until, quite unexpectedly, lots of other colours come along who are all shapes and all sizes with every kind of music. The horrible rules are torn up and, getting to know each other, everyone discovers that being different is the best thing ever.

The bright and cheerful illustrations are very appealing, with clear, plain words showing development of the story. Who couldn't love the dramatic, 'Now there was trouble,' for instance. The shapes have dear little personalities that call a response from the reader.

Along Came A Different tells every child that being different is the best thing ever.

Gwen Grant

The Art Garden

Penny Harrison, illus. Penelope Pratley, pub. EKBooks

Children can sometimes focus more on what they can't do rather than what they can and in the lively and engaging story of *The Art Garden*, Sadie, longing to be an artist like her best friend Tom, but finding her paintings fail, grows discouraged. Tom paints amazing shapes, colours and stories and Sadie wishes she could paint like him for Tom's pictures make her heart smile. Each time Sadie's pictures go wrong she plants daffodils, bakes cakes, picks daisies, catches tadpoles and is very happy. However, when Tom goes back to his painting, Sadie dismisses all the lovely things she can do and wants to be an artist all over again.

It's only when she has an accident with her paints and runs away to sulk in a tree, that Sadie, staring down at the garden, sees a different way to paint a picture. This time, she uses her paint brush to make holes for seeds and when the seeds grow into flowers, Sadie can see she has created a work of art, different to Tom's, but every bit as beautiful.

The illustrations, in clear, true colours are very appealing with lots of interesting detail on every page, details that tell Sadie's story in a very different way to the words. *The Art Garden* is a story that will not only encourage a child to value what they create but, just as importantly, also to value the creative works of others.

Gwen Grant

Dinosaurs Don't Draw

Elli Woolard, illus. Steven Lenton, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

Did you know that dinosaurs don't draw? Of course you didn't, no-one did really but hold on just one minute we mustn't always assume for it seems that there is in fact one dinosaur who does draw.

Mostly we know dinosaurs for their noisy stomping, their big and dangerous jaws, their roaring and all-round scariness. However prepare to be surprised for here is one little blue dinosaur who in fact does draw, is probably not very roary but is very creative...

Picassaur (parents you will love this pun and play on the famous name and why not take the opportunity to try and explain it to your little ones) loves nothing more than to draw, to create. Problem is that this has made him far from fierce and certainly a dinosaur who won't fight. Is this going to be a problem? Quite possibly not as Picassaur learns to use his skills to very great effect, terrifying some of the most ferocious predators and proving that dinosaur's do in fact draw.

What are you waiting for grab those crayons, that chalk and get drawing – be inspired by the bright, fun creations on every page in this book – a riot of fun and I can only imagine what Steven Lenton’s practice sketch books looked like for this one!

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Forever Or A Day

Sarah Jacoby, pub. Chronicle Books

Forever Or A Day by Sarah Jacoby brings moments of time – long and short – alive. A single day is painted in the most luscious colours with an expansiveness, yet simplicity that connects each page. The colours of the day, of sunrise and sunset, flow through the book, sometimes almost disappearing but always there, somewhere.

This lovely picture book made me feel nostalgic, present, and incredibly aware, that one day THIS will be a memory. This is probably due to Sarah Jacoby’s brilliant pinpointing of a feeling, like ‘a heartbeat skip hello’ - surely one of the best feelings in the world?

Time is fluid, as Dali once said and this is reflected within the pages of the story – or is it a poem? – as the reader is taken through different parts of the day, and moments we all have: sometimes we treasure, some last forever, some are over too soon, and sometimes we are just in a rush. But Time encompasses everything.

We follow a family through a day at a pace that speeds up, and slows down in small degrees: from counting the seconds when catching a bus; the idyllic hours slipping past too quickly during a perfect day by the lake; the forever-ness of a train journey...

‘It is a drumbeat
ba dum, ba dum, ba dum
Is this what forever feels like?’

Most people, at some point have had a train journey and heard the beat of the rails beneath them: ba dum, ba dum, ba dum. It does feel like forever. Sometimes, ‘forever’ is a good thing, sometimes not!

Adults and children can both relate to the feelings brought alive on the pages of *Forever or a Day*, and also the mystery of the search for that illusive thing called ‘time’ and its elastic nature.

This book’s musings have captured memories and ‘the moment’ and days to come. As a result it is a peaceful, simple and profound book. Lovely bedtime reading to cuddle up to; treasured moments are to be shared, after all.

Anja Stobbart

Gaspard the Fox

Zeb Soanes, illus. James Mayhew, pub. Graffeg

Don't miss this splendid book! Gaspard is 'the handsomest fox in London', and newsreader Zeb Soanes introduces us to the first in a series of picturebooks which highlight the adventures of one of the many foxes who co-exist with human city dwellers in most urban environments.

Inspired by an injured fox which he befriended; Soanes' new friend continued to visit his garden whenever she heard his bicycle approaching. Soanes assumed his was a dog fox, but when it later arrived with its cubs he realised it was actually a vixen. In the picturebook, however, Gaspard is a young dog fox, still discovering what life in the city is all about. We see him make friends with some of the other city animals, and with one human, who welcomes his presence, unlike many others who resent what they view as his dirty, untidy ways.

Soanes shows us the risky life that an urban fox endures but celebrates the enrichment which wildlife of all kinds brings to the lives of those who are surrounded by the pressured, dirty, uncertain life of cities. We see that city foxes constantly live dangerously, and Gaspard learns how to avoid the situations which most threaten him. In a single evening he meets 'Peter', the rather superior, aloof grey cat with a dreadful secret, and Finty the mongrel, and explores the complexities of the urban landscape.

Soanes' word-rich text and 'foxy facts' ('Peter' attributes his own vocabulary to daily BBC Radio 4 listening), are informative, exciting and funny – Peter's closely guarded secret is a wonderful example – and accessible to a wide range of listeners and readers. Gaspard's story is also beautifully served by James Mayhew's vibrant illustrations, distinctive, smoky images of real places (Acton), full of detail and action. He perfectly captures the essence of the busy city, the variety of its places, its people and its animals. He shows that Gaspard is indeed the handsomest fox in London.

Readers will look forward to renewing their acquaintance in the next two books.

Bridget Carrington

Goat's Coat

Tom Percival, illus. Christine Pym, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Alfonzo the goat is terribly proud of his lovely new coat, with buttons of glass, and a collar the colour of freshly cut-grass. Everyone admires it, and he skips along, until he finds a family of frogs whose log house has rotted away, and he uses stitches from his coat to make them a boat. As the story progresses and Goat goes along he uses other parts of his coat to help lots of other animals: he bandages a cat's tail, makes part of his coat into a rope to rescue a chick stuck up a tree, and solves "more problems still" - until he has no coat left.

He trudges home in the snow, and takes shelter behind a large boulder, then a light shines on him, and he finds that the animals that he has helped have brought him a sweater, made of things they could find, for being so kind. He seems able to hang on to the sweater, as he wears it all the time. The story is written completely in rhyme, and goes along quite well, but the idea is rather like Julia Donaldson's "The smartest Giant in town".

Whilst the illustrations are fun the goat is odd- it could be one of many animals. A charming book on many levels if a little odd on others.

Diana Barnes

Grandmas From Mars

Michelle Robinson, illus. Fred Blunt, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

While you should never judge a book by its cover, you can tell that *Grandmas from mars* is going to be lots of fun from first glance.

Fred and Nell's parents are off to a meeting so Grandma is coming to babysit. As they leave, Mum and Dad leave instructions as it's school in the morning and they can't stay up late. "So: homework, a bath - and in bed before eight."

Just to show how good grandmas are at babysitting we are given a quick look at other grandmas in town as they abide by the rules and keep the children under control.

In the meantime, up on Mars, aliens are hatching a plan to invade. The wily aliens can see that grandmas know what they are doing and think that if they looked like grandmas everyone would listen to them too.

All of the grandmas are beamed aboard the spaceship and are replaced by the aliens in disguise. Although the children realise that there's something not quite right the grandmas seem lots of fun, staying up all night and going wild. It's not until they spot the spare eyeball, tail and striped tongue that they decide to run. The invading grandmas go rampaging through town, crushing cards and

swinging from lampposts. The children realize that it's up to them to put a stop to the alien invasion and there's only one way to do it – 'beat them at their own game' and attack with a big sloppy kiss. Michelle Robinson's rhyming text flows very well making this a joy to read out loud. It's fun and silly and children will love it.

Fred Blunt is just the person to compliment Michelle with his fun, quirky illustration style. There's lots to look at on each page and children will love revisiting the book to spot little details that they've missed.

Vicky Harvey

Hello Hello

Brendan Wenzel, pub. Chronicle Books

In this picture book, illustrator Brendan Wenzel gives children the opportunity to meet and say hello to some of his favourite animals – 92 of them in all – from the common housecat to the critically endangered Sunda pangolin as they parade across the pages accompanied by no more than a couple of words of text as the animals say hello. The couple of words of text is all that's needed to spark conversation and introduce new ways of seeing to young children. Whether it's "Hello Stripes, Hello Spots" or "Hello Neighbour, Hello Friend" it all works very well and is nicely rounded off at the end with "A World to see, A World to know... Where to begin? Hello Hello."

As well as introducing the young reader to a huge variety of animals, the interesting groupings, and the way they are presented provide new and interesting way of seeing and comparing, be it by size, shape, pattern, colour, or more specific or abstract features.

This picture book is big, bright, bold and exuberant... a real celebration of the diversity of the animal kingdom. Usefully, the last couple of pages are made up of miniaturized versions of all the animal pictures, each one numbered and named for identification – together with a label identifying some as endangered, threatened, vulnerable or critically endangered.

This is a great book that animal loving children will delight in revisiting and poring over.

Vicky Harvey

How Many Trees?

Barroux, pub. Egmont

A group of animals ask each other a teasing question: how many trees make a forest?

There is much debate about the question. Do five hundred trees make a forest? Is the test whether there are enough trees to play hide and seek behind them?

Questions of authority also arise. The king of the animals might claim the right to determine how many trees are required, but there seems to be some uncertainty about which animal has the right to the royal title.

Amidst the hubbub the animals ignore a tiny voice saying 'I know how many trees it takes to make a forest'. Eventually however the little voice makes itself heard. The ant says that it takes one tree to make a forest, since a single seed starts the process and the seeds spread until the forest is completed. The animals are impressed by the ant's amazing insight. The ant is made king – but only for one day.

Two ducks add a philosophical question: which came first, the seed or the tree?

Barroux has set out a philosophical text with the lightest of touches. How is truth defined? How do we establish and agree the dialectic in which matters of truth and falsehood are to be discussed? How do we establish the authority of the truth-teller?

The illustrations are deliberately primitive. The questions outweigh the pictures on the page.

Rebecca Butler

I Do Not Like Books Anymore

Daisy Hirst, pub. Walker Books

Learning to read is one of life's greatest challenges and joys! As adults we don't always remember how scary letters were before we knew and recognised them. Daisy Hirst has captured these first reading moments brilliantly- "the letters and words looked like prickles or birds' feet".

Learning this new skill can be exciting but also scary. Perseverance is key in learning something new, especially reading, as the main character Natalie realises throughout the book. Natalie and her brother Alphonse enjoy all types of books and stories. They already know that stories build their imagination and create new worlds to explore. They already know that when they can read, they will have all the stories in the world, whenever they want them.

However, Natalie is disappointed by her first reading book from school. She cannot understand the letters or words and she begins to feel frustrated. Mum and Dad support her and praise her until she finally works it out. She can read all about the cat. Alphonse is thrilled, now his sister can read to him

about trains and bears. Natalie cannot make sense of the words in the other books and so Natalie's frustration grows until she does not like books anymore.

It takes some imagination and some time playing with her toys before Natalie sees that stories can be told and enjoyed. She and Alphonse create a book together by drawing the pictures. Dad helps out with writing the story told by Natalie and Alphonse. Later, they all share the story together and Natalie can read the book, with help from her little brother.

Such a simple story with a huge impact - a perfect story to share with young children who are learning to read and could identify with Natalie. The illustrations are colourful and vibrant and leap off the page. I love the characters!

A wonderful addition to any bookshelf!

Erin Foote

Is It A Mermaid?

Candy Gourlay, illus. Francesca Chessa, pub. Otter-Barry Books

Candy Gourlay is well known now for her books for juniors and young teens, here she turns her hand to a picture book. Set in the Philippines - this is where Candy comes from - it tells the story of how Benji and Bel, playing on the beach, find a dugong, a seal-like creature. The dugong insists though, that she is a beautiful mermaid.

She sings, and the children ask her to STOP! "But mermaids love to sing!" She thinks she is graceful, but the children tell her quite categorically that she is a Dugong, a sea cow, and she gets very upset. "We mermaids are very sensitive" and the children realizing that they have hurt her feelings, apologize.

Fortunately, mermaids are also very forgiving, and they play and have a lot of fun, until she has to go, as mermaids never stay out after dark, but she promises to come and play again. As she disappears into the sunset, her tail does look rather like that of a mermaid... At the end of the book, Candy gives us lots of information about dugongs.

It's a simple story, but Candy wrote this so that children like her might have a book showing people they recognize. The tropical setting, the bamboo house and the lush vegetation mean that this could be any of a few places around the world. Children can even spot a fish looking rather like Nemo!

Francesca Chessa's illustrations are colourful and the characters lively and sympathetic. Together, author and illustrator show that we need to be respectful of people's feelings, and perhaps let them be what they want to be.

Diana Barnes

Looking After William

Eve Coy, pub. Andersen Press

Eve Coy's first picture book – in fact her first book – is a delight!

Based on her observations of her two daughters when toddlers Coy offers readers an intriguing viewpoint: that of a small girl whose roleplay gives us an inverted view of the parent/child relationship. We never learn her name, because today she is 'mummy', looking after her little boy William. Without the pictures we would take this at face value, and we would see the entire short narrative from an adult mother's point of view, a proud mother who sees great potential in her exhausting, funny and clever, but greatly loved child. With Coy's soft, immensely child-friendly illustrations, however, we find that mummy is actually a small girl, and William is her dad. Her actual mother passes by in the background of a couple of the spreads, and enters into their play in the final image, but for the great part of the story it is 'mummy' and William (and the family cat) who are centre stage, and around whom the narrative revolves.

The first spread tells us that us 'This is my little boy, William' but what we actually see is a bearded grown-up man, paintbrush in hand, working on what seems to be the little girl's play-mat on the dining table.

'Mummy' isn't in sight, but on the succeeding spreads she appears and tells us in a short sentence or two that he likes to get up early (it's clear from the image that he is being woken up from a peaceful sleep in the early morning by 'mummy'), then she gets him ready (actually William is sorting out clothes for 'mummy') and gets his breakfast.

William, we learn keeps her busy because he needs a lot of attention, which can be tricky because 'mummy' has a lot of jobs to do. William is so clever he could do all sorts of amazing jobs, but only in the penultimate spread are we told what his job actually is -her Dad!

A beautiful book to share with toddlers.

Bridget Carrington

The New Baby

Lisa Stickley, pub. Pavilion Children's Books

Lisa Stickley's latest picture book, *The New Baby*, is narrated by Edith. (I believe Edith already has two previous books under her belt.) Edith has a baby brother called Albert. In this book, she relates the highlights of their first year together - and a surprising number of stand-out moments involve noises!

From his very loud cries to his 'teeny windy pops' and the 'plop' of his food as it hits the floor through to the 'wobble flump' as he also hits the floor in his big, padded nappy when he's learning to walk, this is a book full of delicious sound imagery. Readers, get stuck in!

I like the way the book is structured via the months of the year - it's shocking how many children of quite advanced school age do not know the correct sequence of the months, so I'm all for starting early. Edith charts the developmental stages of a typical baby, but from an observant and curious big-sister's perspective. She has to hold her nose when he does a particularly stinky poo in April and she thinks it's funny when he slowly keels over into his cushions in June. However, when she helps him celebrate his first birthday she doesn't hesitate to declare that she loves him and all his accompanying noises.

Designer, Lisa Stickley's illustrations are quirky and colourful. They're full of beautiful patterns and texture - there's no mistaking that vintage textiles are her joy. The visual fun, coupled with her playful narrative voice and ear for sound, make this book a treat to look at and to read aloud. It would be the loveliest book to read with the older siblings of new babies.

Jackie Spink

Not Just a Book

Jeanne Willis, illus. Tony Ross, pub. Andersen Press

A picture book written and illustrated by children's book royalty! This is an amazing pairing of strengths.

Simple text, beautiful illustrations and a book as the main character, what more could you ask for? This book is wonderfully funny and engaging and perfect for younger readers just learning how amazing the world of books can be. Toddlers use books as many things before they open the pages and as they grow the wonder of books grows with them. They can be used for so many things!

How many uses can you find for a book? How far can you stretch your imagination? As far as you like and as many as you can think of. A hat, a funnel, fly swatter, toy train tunnel? A little girl and her cat

take your imagination far as they test out the limits of the book and then sit down to enjoy the story within.

A brilliant ending stating what every book lover feels: that a book is to be read and loved! What bigger, more important message can we send to all readers?

Erin Foote

Not My Hats

Tracy Gunaratnam, illus. Alea Marley, pub. Maverick Arts Publishing

Hettie is a polar bear with an unusual hobby – she collects hats. She has hats of all shapes and sizes, round, pointy, ‘fancy hoity toity’, and she loves to wear them all.

However, Hettie doesn’t share hats. Hettie is so serious about this that when a chilly puffin pops up and asks if he can have one to keep him warm, she is adamant that it’s totally impossible for her to let him share her hats. Hetty is not ungenerous though. She opens her bag and shows him that she’ll happily share almost anything, her lollies, dollies, books and brollies, flippers, slippers, and even her kippers, but no, never, ever her hats!

As he’s hungry, Puffin is willing to settle for a kipper, and trots off while Hetty changes her hat. When Puffin comes back again asking for a hat, Hetty gets even more indignant and tells him even more firmly that she’s happy to share all her other belongings, but never, ever will she share her hats. Join Hettie and her friend Puffin as they learn a valuable lesson about sharing.

Puffin opts for her kindly offered slippers to keep him warm, and off he goes, leaving Hetty to have a snooze and dream about all her wonderful hat collection, only to be rudely awoken by... Yes, it’s Puffin again, but this time he has a new idea – swapsies, and after several suggestions are refused by Hetty, she sees the wonderful possibilities of sharing – but you’ll have to read the book to find out what!

Gunaratnam tells a simple story, but it’s a story which resonates with us all. We all know how hard it is to share, even when we’ve got plenty of something, and like Hetty we get crosser and crosser when someone keeps asking. When Hetty gets cross, the size of the text gets bigger and bigger, and the background colour to the bold, funny illustrations gets hotter and hotter.

Marley’s illustrations are a perfect match for the energetic text, with plentiful detail in each spread for a child to explore and talk about whilst being simple, colourful and full of character. When a two-year-old and a five-year-old both laugh out loud at the same time it’s clear that the book is a gem. In this case it is an absolute riot! The children especially loved Hettie’s ‘hatmosphere’ and had great fun deciding on our own favourite hats (the crab hat, blue hat and fancy hoity toity hat in case you’re

interested). Hettie's increasing emphatic refusal to swap a hat for a gnome, a comb or a dog with a bone was another particular highlight.

With hugely memorable rhyming lists for readers to join in with, this is a splendid book which deserves a place on every small person's reading menu. This is a brilliant book for young children. We highly recommend it.

Erin Foote

The Story of Tantrum O'Furrily

Cressida Cowell, illus. Mark Nicholas, pub. Hodder Children's Books

Mark Nicholas is the first winner of the Carmelite Picture Book Prize. Given the text without knowing who had written it his challenge, along with all others who entered, was to illustrate it and Mark was the very worthy winner who is going to be a talent to look out for.

Cressida Cowell's text is that of the story of a cat called Tantrum O'Furrily and her three hungry kittens. Tantrum wants to tell them a story to distract their rumbling tummies and as she sings the story is brought to life in glorious (primarily) black and white charcoal and a touch of watercolour illustration that gently sweeps across the pages, following the adventure as it is narrated and bringing it gently and yet passionately to life.

Swoop across the pages, tumble up and down hills, run from the fox and have a wonderful adventure. Delve into the story and be drawn into its pictures, learn all about courage and hear a new fable, one that you and your young readers will not tire of any time soon. Watch, listen, learn and enjoy.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Thinker – My Puppy Poet and Me

Eloise Greenfield, illus. Ehsan Abdollahi, pub. Tiny Owl Publishing

Eloise Greenfield is the winner of the 2018 Coretta Scott King - Virginia Hamilton Lifetime Achievement Award (an award given to an African American author/illustrator 'who has made a significant and lasting literary contribution') and *Thinker, My Puppy Poet and Me* is her 47th children's book.

The book tells the story of Thinker, a speaking poetic puppy and his relationship with seven-year-old Jace and his family. Jace is a poet too and is delighted to discover that Thinker is. The two of them go through their day sharing their experiences and thoughts in poems.

Jace is worried what other people will think if they find out that Thinker can talk so tells him to just watch, think and bark when other people are around. Thinker is reminded of this rule when Jace takes him to school, but sitting there, the puppy feels sad, realizing that he is pretending to be something that he isn't and before he knows what's happening he is up and running around the classroom reciting funny poems.

Rather than a typical rhyming story, this book is a delightful collection of 16 poems, whilst some adhere to strict poetry form most are in a rhythmic free verse - there's even a rap at the end.

Thinker, My Puppy Poet and Me is a great collection of poems that celebrate exploring life and being yourself. Ehsan Abdollahi's bold and bright artwork, which consists of handmade and coloured paper collages perfectly complements Eloise's words and adds a life of its own.

Damian Harvey, www.damianharvey.co.uk, @damianjharvey

Tiger Lily

Gwen Millward, pub. Egmont

Well, I was supposed to write this review, but then Tiger said: "Let's go wild instead!" So here I now am, sitting in my treehouse in Borneo, making kazoos. And I still have to write a review!

Tiger is the wild in all of us: the impetuosity, the impulsiveness, the cheek. The part that acts first and thinks later, the adventure.

Lily has a Tiger. Tiger is the friend no-one else sees, who coaxes Lily into crazy fun into outright naughtiness. Tiger is Lily, Lily is Tiger. This is the story of how Lily gives in to Tiger, regrets it, putting Tiger in his place. It's lovely. It's a lively, energetic read that skips easily through engaging events. It's the sort of story you want to read with a child so you can share their delight. And I think they'll be delighted. From the squiggly, bounding crayon art to the sharp depictions of familiar emotions. This is a very well-told tale.

I love the intensity of it, but also the evocative details, how the grass is full of eyes, how there's a picture of Tiger on the wall. Gwen Millward creates an immediately immersive world; I felt I knew this place and these people.

I think *Tiger Lily* is a story children will want to reread, and that adults will happily reread with them just to enjoy the colour and life, the irrepressibility and authenticity the story has. It has that quality and individuality.

I think we'll all want to spend some time with Tiger.

Dmytro Bojaniwskyj

The Very Hungry Hedgehog

Rosie Wellesley, pub. Pavilion Books

The Very Hungry Hedgehog is a book with a difference, for it faces head-on the fact that animals eat each other. This could be traumatic for a small child but the illustrations have a sympathy and understanding that must reassure the smallest reader.

After a long winter's sleep, Hedgehog is woken by his friend, Starling, who is unkind about Hedgehog's 'bad hair day.' When Hedgehog finds a fat worm to eat, Starling steals it. So hungry Hedgehog goes looking for food unaware that Fox is watching him, for Fox is hungry, too.

Hedgehog finds a beetle, but Toad eats it. He finds a slug but Heron whisks it away and Hedgehog's feelings are hurt by Starling mocking him, Toad being mean and Heron snatching his food. If only everyone would share, he thinks, there would be plenty for all. All the way through the book, that sneaky fox is waiting. Hiding amongst leaves; tail whisking away; head peering over a row of plants; nose and pointy ears peeking out of a bush.

Until, just as Hedgehog is going to eat an earwig, that hungry fox tries to eat him but it wasn't a bad hair day after all. It was a good spiky day and the spikes hurt Fox's mouth so much, he drops Hedgehog.

The illustrations with their soft colours and close detail will capture any child's interest. Hedgehog, especially, is very sweet but I must admit, when I saw the relieved face of the earwig as it fell to the ground, I was glad it had escaped.

A book that works on so many levels with a quiet sympathy and clear eye.

Gwen Grant

The Wardrobe Monster

Bryony Thomson, pub. Old Barn Books

It's a very tired Dora, Penguin, Lion and Bear who we meet at breakfast one morning. Why are they so tired? A sleepover? A midnight feast? Nothing that is so much fun I am afraid, the reason for the tiredness is lack of sleep but owing to the scary wardrobe monster. So tired are Dora and her

companions that they are grumpy when it comes to lunch, in a grouch when it is time to go out and trying everything possible to avoid bedtime – how long can they stay in the bath, how many stories can they share?

In the end it is no good, Dora has to go to bed but can she be brave? Will tonight be different just as lion promises?

A big bang, bang, bang keeps the companions awake. What is it? Who is brave enough to find out – no-one? Will hiding under the covers help? Share Dora and her companions fear as you see the expressions gently drawn on their faces in the delightful illustration that I am quite certain has been done mostly in crayon. Turn the pages if you dare and discover just what it is which is making all the noise and that just maybe it isn't at all as bad as it may at first seem...

Louise Ellis-Barrett

We Wear Pants

Katie Abey, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Do you love to get dressed or find it a boring tedious must do task? Some days I love it, some days it is a chore, but it is always with a tingle of excitement that I wonder what shall I wear, what combination can I get away with? It's easier when we are not at school – no uniform to contend with, we can be ourselves, but of course even with a uniform you can be yourself for there are the pants, socks and more to add to the outfit that will make us just that little bit of 'us'.

In Katie Adey's riotous, colourful and hilarious picturebook we find a selection of animals dressing for the day – one day it is hats, another coats and yet another shorts. Did you know that Panda's wear pants, that a horse can have red and green spotty socks, that bear can't decide which scarf will be best and that giraffes wear hats in the winter!

Through this book children are given the opportunity to choose their favourite things from the 12 spreads, why not take one from each and create an amazing outfit? To help them along there are plenty of silly pictures and a reminder that at the end of the day even all these animals get into the pyjamas and snuggle down for the night.

Helping children think about being creative and individual this is a silly, fun and informative book.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

What's At the Top?

Marc Martin, pub. Templar Publishing

This is a totally fantastic flight of imagination as we are asked what might be at the top of a ladder. The questioner comes up with increasingly more complex possibilities; the amount of text increasing as the book continues. The twist at the end of the story, when we see who is asking the questions will have everyone smiling, but I am not going to give away the identity.

Marc Martin has the wonderful ability to create something quite deep and profound from a very simple text and set of illustrations. His use of space is complex and he manages to fire our imaginations as we contemplate what the answer to the question could be.

The text is written in rhyme and the use of language helps bring a different pace to the story as it moves along. The images themselves tend to be very simple with a plain background, although this can be varied in order to fit with the written word. Each double page spread is slightly different, so that the reader is always excited and challenged by what they see. The colours are vivid but not garish and the palette is appropriate to the subject matter.

Overall this is a delightful book which will work with KS1 as well as with the very young and will be a joy to read.

Margaret Pemberton

Junior Book Reviews

A Good Day for Climbing Trees

Jaco Jacobs, trans. Kobus Geldenhuys, illus. Jim Tierney, pub. Rock the Boat/Oneworld

The UK book market has historically had woefully few new children's books translated from languages other than English. In translating and marketing *A Good Day for Climbing Trees* publishers Oneworld, collaborating with Arts Council England and BookTrust, allow us to see a sample of the jewels we miss. *A Good Day for Climbing Trees* was selected as an Honour Title in 2017 for BookTrust's 'In Other Words' project. It was originally published in Afrikaans by LAPA Publishers in 2017, just one of Jaco Jacobs' 120-plus titles for young people.

It's the summer holidays and 13-year-old Marnus feels invisible, sandwiched between a handsome and arrogant older brother (he gives paid kissing lessons to his female acquaintances), and his cute but crafty and entrepreneurial little brother (he collects the fees for the kissing lessons).

Then, one day, a girl called Leila shows up at the house with a petition to save a nearby tree. It is the start of an extraordinary adventure that changes Marnus' life. The two become local heroes and bring the community – full of weird and wonderful characters – closer together. For the first time, Marnus feels people are noticing him.

In Marnus, Jacobs creates a shy character with whom we can all empathize, and when we observe his family we can see how the brothers have been allowed to become who they are. Mum is a high-flying lawyer totally immersed in her work, while Dad is struggling, attempting to prevent his sports shop from failing. Neither is deliberately unavailable for their sons, but in taking action to prevent Leila's special tree from being felled, Marnus achieves an active, focussed, independence rather than a merely suffering a lack of positive parental engagement.

Leila too has family reasons for her action, her mother supportive but damaged by her marital breakdown. Leila too emerges from their tree crusade a stronger person, better able to cope realistically and positively with her life. Jacobs has a dry, quiet, but intensely humorous style which draws readers into the narrative and makes this such an easily accessible, truthful account of adolescent life. Sequels would be welcomed!

Bridget Carrington

Alice Dent and the Incredible Germs

Gwen Lowe, pub. Chicken House

Alice lives in a world where everyone is terrified of catching a virus, and there is one particular virus which worries the Best Minister for Everything Nicely Perfect more than anything else. That is the Happiness Virus because, when people are happy, they become uncontrollable and act in all sorts of spontaneous ways. There is, however, an underground network, consisting of a very small number of adults, who are determined to thwart the Best Minister's plans to remove joy from everyday life.

Alice finds herself at the centre of all this when she develops a mystery virus and the Best Minister himself becomes determined to find her before she can spread it to other people. To evade capture, Alice, under an assumed name, gets herself apprehended by the police and placed in the dreadful Tryton Mell boarding school. It is here she meets like-minded children and makes contact with the network and sets about foiling the Best Minister's plans.

This is a very funny story, complete with a dastardly villain, evil henchmen and ineffective parents. In fact, only a few adults come out well in this story and support Alice against the Best Minister. Alice is aided mostly by a group of children she meets at Tryton Mell who become firm allies despite/because of being completely different characters. The trials and tribulations of boarding school life are examined here to great comic effect, particularly the inedible food and the emphasis on hygiene above all else.

Chapters are reasonably short and confident young readers will be hooked from the first chapter by this mix of humour and adventure.

This book would also work well as a class read.

June Hughes

The Art of White Roses

Viviana Prado-Núñez, pub. Papilote Press

The second award-winning Caribbean novel from Papillote Press featured in this summer set of Armadillo reviews recalls Cuban history from seventy years ago. This is probably unfamiliar to most twenty-first century twelve to fourteen-year-old readers, and therefore the publicity for the original self-published novel by Viviano Prado-Núñez sets the scene admirably:

'It is 1957 in Marianao, a suburb on the outskirts of Havana. Adela Santiago is thirteen years old and lives in a small blue house with her mother, father, brother, and grandfather. And yet something is amiss. Her neighbours are disappearing. One by one they are being abducted in the night and no one knows who is responsible. Not only that, but her parents' marriage seems to be disintegrating before her, and her sixteen-year-old cousin is involved with a bombing at the Hotel Nacional.

Welcome to a world where the sight of police officers shooting citizens in broad daylight is a normalcy, where every day there is a higher body count than the day before, where in the cramped pews of churches, in the creaking wood of people's front porches, in the floating smoke of backwards Havana alleys, a revolution is brewing.' This is the run-up to the revolution headed by Fidel Castro, and Puerto-Rican Prado-Núñez powerfully captures the poverty, the oppression and the fear in the population, a community where it is wisest to trust few, and to keep a very low profile.

This is a historical novel, yet the situations depicted, the experiences, and particularly the emotions of Adela have relevance for today in the many parts of the world that we hear about daily in the media, and for our own inner-city lives.

Interspersed with colloquial Spanish, (and therefore likely to enrich the street vocabulary of its readers!), the book is steeped in the Cuban atmosphere of the time, and the title derives from a poem by José Martí, a Cuban national hero in the late nineteenth-century fight for freedom from Spain.

Prado-Núñez herself paints powerful word-pictures which insightfully recreate the families, the domestic scenes and the fears and hopes of life which inform Adela's coming-of-age.

Bridget Carrington

Big Foot and Little Foot

Ellen Potter, illus. Felicita Sala, pub. Abrams and Chronicle Books

Come and read, discover, and dream about a grand adventure in the big wide world. Two unlikely friends meet, and barriers come down between humans and sasquatches. This is a wonderful story for all those with imagination and a sense of adventure.

Hugo is a young sasquatch who dreams of meeting a human and of sailing the seas. During a daring game of Hide and Go Sneak, Hugo comes face to face with a boy. He wants to be free to roam the big wide world as humans do. Hugo contemplates the human and wonders what it would be like to be friends with a human boy. A stream runs through Hugo's bedroom and an idea strikes him. He sends his wooden toy boat into the world via the stream. What happens next begins an exciting chapter in young Hugo's life. A note comes back and Hugo realizes it was the boy he faced in the woods. They share notes, building a friendship, and Hugo takes the brave step to tell Boone that he is a sasquatch. Sadly, Boone does not believe him so Hugo takes an even braver step to find Boone and prove it to him.

Hugo's adventurous spirit and determination are tested as he struggles to find Boone in the big wide world. Trouble soon finds Hugo and he needs help to get out of the raging river. Help comes in the

form of the human Hugo has been searching for. Boone saves Hugo and finally believes that he is a real sasquatch. The two pair up and begin looking for other mysterious mythic animals. The shared sense of adventure brings them closer together and they go looking for Ogotogo's and Snoot-Nosed Gint's.

The end of the story is as brilliant as the rest of it. Boone is keen to meet Hugo's family and friends but they might not want to meet a human. Can Hugo be brave and bold and bring Boone into the woods? Read on to find out!

This is a truly wonderful book to share with children of all ages. The illustrations bring Hugo and his world to life and I can imagine young sasquatches in the wild writing notes to their friends, just as human children do.

Erin Foote

The Book Case (An Emily Lime Mystery)

Dave Shelton, pub. David Fickling Books

Daphne's parents are delighted when, out of the blue and following expulsion from her previous school over a regrettable incident, Daphne is offered a scholarship at St Rita's, where she will be of great help in the library. Once at St Rita's, Daphne quickly realizes that this is not a normal boarding school.

The grounds and the building are suffering from a lack of maintenance and the girls are 'a little rough around the edges', according to Miss Bagley. The library itself seems to be remarkably short of books and Emily Lime, Assistant Librarian, is in need of convincing that she needs an Assistant Librarian. Soon, however, Daphne, Emily and George (the only boy at this girls' school) are on the trail of a mystery involving a safety deposit box robbery, missing books and fraud.

Whilst for younger readers this is a long book at nearly 360 pages, individual chapters are reasonably short. The main characters, Daphne, George and Emily, are all likeable and the interplay between them is very funny as they gradually come to the realization that something odd is going on.

Solving the mystery involves impersonations, bike chases and a train and the adventure moves along at quite a pace.

Confident readers will soon get the feel of St Rita's and its extraordinary labyrinthine layout, as well as some of the stranger characters amongst the other girls and the teachers. Readers will be left thinking that they want to read more adventures of possibly the only schoolgirl librarian detective and her assistants.

June Hughes

The Chocolate Factory Ghost (The Dundoodle Mysteries)

David O'Connell, illus. Claire Powell, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Archie McBudge finds that he had a Great-Uncle he didn't know about, who has left him all his earthly possessions, and wonders whether that means he has been left some gardening tools. He soon finds out that he owns the McBudge Factory, a huge house called Honeystone Hall, and, apparently, lots of money. He must be wearing his lucky underpants! Great-uncle Archie has set him a test though, to prove his worthiness, and, with the help of mechanically minded Fliss, daughter of the Chief Engineer at the factory, and geeky Billy, expert in all things 'Wyrd' (illustrated as possibly Indian), he sets about solving the clues pointed out by a flying letter.

There is magic in this book- some of it used by Archie's deceased Dad's cousin, Mrs Puddingham-Pye to scare him, and Archie has to learn to make good use of it. Aided by her two dreadful children, Mrs P-P wants to make sure that she, as the next heir, will get her hands on the factory that makes everyone's favourite fudge, as well as other delicious sweets. The ghost, is, of course, Great-Uncle Archibald- he has winked at young Archie from his portrait on the first page- and he/it is able to sort everything out at the end.

The Scottish setting is well imagined- we have a map of the area around Dundoodle to enable us to follow what happens when the children leave the house and venture onto Loch Flicmaibogie (there are more jokes, not all like that one!) All the clues involve sweets of some kind, and Billy is soon stuffing all the pockets in his coat. The characters are, with one exception, clearly goodies or baddies, and we find out near the end of the book which one is a baddie after all. Archie is in a one-parent family, but Mum generally is not involved with the goings-on.

David O'Connell is an established author and illustrator, notably for the *Monster and Chips* series, and some picture books including *When I'm a Mummy Like You* and *When I'm A Monster Like You, Dad* – he is quite keen on monsters!

Claire Powell is a graphic artist who has also illustrated plenty of picture books, including *Princess Scallywag and the Brave, Brave Knight* and her drawings are just as much fun as this story.

This is subtitled Book 1 of *The Dundoodle Mysteries*, and we may anticipate further humorous adventures with Archie and his friends.

Diana Barnes

The Company of Eight

Harriet Whitehorn, illus. Maria Urducan, pub. Stripes

Hopefully there's the hint of a sequel left at the end of this rip-roaring fantasy adventure!

With a storyline that chimes so well with its 2018 launch date, it celebrates the fact that when it comes to courage and commitment (and of course circus skills!) girls and women are undoubtedly the equal of boys and men.

We discover fourteen-year-old Cassandra Malvino longing to leave the home of her guardian, Mrs Potts, and about to audition to join the Greatest Circus in the Longest World. Cass is an orphan, the daughter of a famous acrobat father and a mother born with the magical powers of fortune-telling. Not Cass though, who has instead inherited her father's skills and is determined to join the circus which sails around the Longest World visiting the many, very different, islands in the seas beyond Minaris – beautifully mapped at each chapter's start. Mrs Potts, however, a kindly but inveterate social climber, has other plans for Cass, and as a result Cass misses her opportunity to audition.

Faced with a lifetime as an old lady's companion, Cass runs away and buys a passage on a boat in an effort to try to catch up with the Circus Boat at its next stop. Things don't quite work out as she intended, and she faces unscrupulous aristocrats, vicious pirates and encounters mysterious women who aren't quite what they seem.

Whitehorn writes in a fast-paced, vivid style, and creates a cast of – frequently dastardly – boys and men. Nevertheless, among these Cass finds one or two who are truthful and brave and we can see that there is a special friendship developing with one.

However, it is the women who stand out, the mysterious Elsba, and Lady Sigh, ruler of the Island of Women, and the Company of Eight themselves, a secret society whose daring and determination to rid their world of evil is in stark contrast to the devious men.

I certainly hope there is a sequel intended for this entertaining novel, as it is a story that will surely engage older KS1 and KS2 readers, be they girls or boys.

Bridget Carrington

Dog Diaries

Steven Butler and James Patterson, illus. Richard Watson, pub. Young Arrow

If you know any fans of James Patterson's Middle School series, featuring Rafe Khatchadorian and his family, then I'm sure their younger siblings would be delighted to make the acquaintance of Junior, the dog they adopt.

Exuberant, enthusiastic and very excited to be able to tell his story, Junior guides his readers round his new home, known as the Catch-A-Doggy-Bone Kennel, with all its amazing rooms to explore. He introduces his new human family and doggy friends in the neighbourhood before describing his experiences at obedience classes.

As Junior is easily distracted, but determined to show how clever he is, these don't always go to plan. However once Junior realizes what is expected of him and doesn't want to be sent back to doggy prison, he determines to try his best and please his person-pal, Ruff.

Lively and funny, these illustrated chaotic canine capers will keep young readers entertained and eagerly anticipating further instalments of Junior's diaries.

Jayne Gould

Elise and the Second-Hand Dog

Bjatne Reuter, illus. Kirsten Raagaard, pub. Wacky Bee Books

Elise is lonely, her dad is doing his best, they sit on the roof in their wicker chairs, eating liquorice from the pockets of mum's old coat and watch the stars. But Elise is not happy, she wants company, more specifically she wants a dog. After all, with Dad out playing his violin at weddings and other celebrations, Mum away in Brazil building a suspension bridge, Elise needs company.

A trip to Potifar's Pet Salon does not bode well, there are some quite weird and wonderful things here but ... is it possible ... yes, it could be that here there is a dog and that somehow Elise manages to take him home. He is quite an ugly dog who looks rather like a rabbit and smells just a little like cheese, but he is a special dog for he can talk ... at least he can to Elise.

With a cast of characters who are all equally odd and quirky this is charming, light-hearted story of one little girl, her far from usual new but second-hand dog and the delightful family she wants to share him with. Bjatne Reuter's writing is fresh, vibrant and free from any restraint, normality is not a part of this story and nor does it need to be for as a reader I could feel the joy exuding from the pages and just imagine her smile as she developed the character of Elise, created the wonderful dog and decided what adventures they and we were going to share together.

Enjoy the style of writing, enjoy the extraordinary, enjoy the story, smile and think about how just because something is second-hand does not mean that it does not need love and cannot give love. Be prepared to be surprised and delighted by this story.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Ella on the Outside

Cath Howe, pub. Nosy Crow

Howe's debut novel is a poignant and thought-provoking story of ten-year-old Ella who arrives at a new school with a big secret concerning her dad, one that her mum has urged her not to confide into anyone. Self-conscious of being the new girl, having very bad eczema on her hands and not giving away this secret, Ella falls under the spell of the queen bee of the class – Lydia. Ella tells us her story and so we hear her thoughts and worries especially when she doubts what is really behind Lydia's demands.

Lydia, herself, comes across as a very believable and recognizable character – a manipulative and selfish bully who demands attention from all of those around her and wants everything her own way. So, when she decides that she is going to focus on the new girl, Ella accidentally let's slip her big secret, which for reasons unexplained, Lydia uses to blackmail Ella into spying on another girl in their class – Molly.

Molly is shy, quiet, and set apart from the others in the class and Ella is curious about her but what she discovers changes her relationship with both girls. She not only discovers that she is not alone in suffering with deep family secrets and the pain of missing a parent but also that she doesn't need to do what Lydia says, she can stand up for herself, and trust her sense of what is right and wrong.

Cath Howe covers a whole range of important themes from being the new girl, feeling alone and insecure, and coping with bullies to having parents who are in prison, dead, physically and mentally ill in her debut novel. It is well written, engaging, full of very recognizable and well-drawn characters and acutely demonstrates how the need to fit in conflicts with the need to stand out plus how important it is to trust yourself when deciding who to be friends with and going along with what these so-called friends want you to do.

Natalie J. McChrystal Plimmer

Every Shiny Thing

Cordelia Jensen and Laurie Morrison, pub. Amulet Books

The lives of two girls from two very different backgrounds cross in this story set in the US, which will appeal to secondary school children. Both girls are tied by bonds of loyalty and love to members of their families, which in both cases affect them deeply.

Lauren's trust in her parents is shaken when her mum and dad decide to send their autistic son Ryan to a boarding school, where they believe his abilities can be better nurtured. Lauren, however, sees this as a selfish act. As she focuses on ways to offset what she considers a betrayal, Lauren hatches a plan to raise money in order to support other autistic children who do not have a similarly privileged background and cannot access the care they need.

Sierra's mother is an alcoholic and her father a convict. When her mother has a relapse, Sierra is taken into foster care by Lauren's neighbours. The background of the two girls could not be more different, yet they soon develop a friendship.

What had started as a positive plan, leads Lauren to steal from and lie to her parents and her former best friend. The rift between them widens. Sierra, meanwhile, confronts her own feelings and her own family relationships to emerge stronger and braver enough to help Lauren from herself.

Lauren and Sierra are the narrators. In alternate chapters Lauren's prose and Sierra's poetry recount the events and explore the feelings and relationships between them and between the characters who complete the cast of this book.

The chapters in verses, Sierra's story, are particularly poignant, as every word of the sparse writing is incredibly meaningful. Sierra emerges as a complex character which is slowly revealed. Lauren's feelings are also well depicted, especially her frustration, the absolute certainty in her beliefs and the growing antagonism with her parents.

Laura Brill

The Fox Girl and the White Gazelle

Victoria Williamson, pub. Kelpies

Three lives intertwine in this touching story of hope and friendship.

A pregnant vixen is injured and displaced from her home and her mate killed by building work. She takes shelter in the garden area of a block of flats, where she is discovered by Caylin. Twelve-year-old Caylin is lonely, struggling to cope with a depressed and alcoholic mother, bullying and stealing from children at school in order to eat, but determined not to tell anyone. When she discovers the fox and her new-born cubs, she is determined to help them and fiercely guards her secret.

Then Reema and her family, refugees from the war in Syria, move into the flat below Caylin's. Reema also feels completely lost, trying to settle in a strange country, facing hostility, with her beloved older brother missing and her father ill.

When Reema joins Caylin's class at school, the girls strike up a wary friendship, cemented by their joint care for the fox family. They also discover a shared love of running and overcome a number of obstacles to compete for their school. Gradually, life improves for all three, with recovery, acceptance and freedom.

The author has given all three lead characters their own voices to tell the story, with the vixen's told as poetry and alternating chapters for the girls written in the first person. As a teacher, Victoria Williamson has worked with children from many different backgrounds whose experiences inspired this book. She wanted to encourage an understanding for and empathy with people whose lives may well be more complicated than that of the reader.

This is certainly accomplished in an inspiring and moving debut novel which I would recommend for readers of 9+.

Jayne Gould

The Girl With More Than One Heart

Laura Geringer Bass, pub. Amulet Books

"I love you..." I told Aaron. "No matter what."

It takes Briana half the book to get there, but she does. I cheered when she did, when she reassured her little brother that he needn't be scared to be different, he was still loved, unconditionally.

It's after this that things start getting properly better for Briana, the book pivots around that point. Until then, Briana's family is disintegrating, without hope. It's been disintegrating for years before the start of the story, but it's Briana's dad's death, at the beginning of the book, that accelerates it. Paradoxically, her dad's death is arguably the best thing that could have happened to Briana. She had idolized him to the point of toxicity. It's as if Aaron's autism and the difficulties around it had prompted a divorce in the family, but one where Briana and her dad stayed, with Briana growing ever-more jealous and resentful of Aaron, ever-more nostalgic and grieving for the Golden Age before he was born.

Her dark perspective hampers her ability to be true to her own nature, to her creativity and unconventionality, and she only starts to discover her true identity once her dad is gone. It frees her to begin learning about friendship, love, and acceptance. About growing up.

So that is the book: a self-focused, selfish thirteen-year-old girl with an unwanted autistic brother loses her favourite parent and deals with life. It's an accurate description, but inadequate.

However much the general story might be familiar, it's its telling that makes this book remarkable. Briana is forensic. Her attention to detail, as the narrator, is compelling and immersive. She creates a living, breathing, beating world succinctly and evocatively. And she is horrible, and believably so, the book is one-eighth in before Briana does anything remotely likeable. These two things together make her an exceptionally real and believable character.

It also means that when her mum becomes depressed and begins heading for a breakdown, Briana is shockingly callous in her observations. It's brave to have such an unpleasant protagonist.

But then through many flashbacks, and by looking past the partisan way Briana relates them, we see how it's taken Briana years to become so bitter. There's a mature sensibility to the way she recalls lost innocence that's saddening, and that makes this as much an adult as a younger read.

It means that once Briana's family starts healing, once Briana herself does start discovering her true identity, that we're utterly involved. We care and feel and cheer. It matters to us that Briana is rescued, is redeemed. It doesn't matter about the story context, we want to hear that articulate, deep-feeling, hurting voice turn towards the light and mend.

I feel the title is misleading, though it is a hook, and perhaps a mystery too: the exact nature of Briana's second heart. I feel that it must be the impact that her dad has had on her feelings, beliefs, identity. It's the presence that our loving a person dearly creates within our self.

I hope your second heart is recommending you read this.

Dmytro Bojaniwskyj

Home Home

Lisa Allen-Agostini, pub. Papilotte Press

Novels with central characters overtly suffering from mental illness remain rare, and novels available to a UK audience written by Caribbean authors are even rarer. *Home Home* is therefore a book to be celebrated in many ways, and not least for the story it tells, and the quality of the writing.

Trinidadian Lisa Allen-Agostini records the voice of a fourteen-year-old girl who has been sent by her single mother to stay with her aunt Jillian in Canada, to recover after a suicide attempt. We don't learn the teenager's name until the final lines of the final page in the book, signifying that at this point

she has travelled far enough in her journey to improved mental health to acknowledge her growth in self-discovery, self-belief and confidence. Kayla's illness results in severe anxiety and panic attacks. Although she is highly intelligent, these in turn result in her inability to perform in exams, or to interact adequately with her peers. Eventually, through talking therapy she – we – come to see that her mother, who appears unsympathetic to her daughter and lacking in any understanding of her condition, has herself been greatly challenged by her own young life.

By contrast we see the happy, stable, racially-diverse relationship in Aunt Jillian's life, which lovingly supports Kayla's gradual recovery. Jillian and her partner Julie accept Kayla into their home and into their hearts, something we feel has never happened, or certainly never been shown, with her mother. Allen-Agostini writes with enormous insight about both mental illness and what some parts of society regard as unconventional lifestyles, and it is made clear that for her target audience in the Caribbean mental illness and same-sex relationships are areas of historic social and religious discomfort, resulting in and from a lack of understanding and compassion.

Papillote Press is based in Dominica and London, and we know that we too in the UK still have much to learn, to understand and to accept about difference and diversity of all sorts, and especially about mental illness.

Kayla's story is deeply insightful and thought-provoking and could valuably underpin any KS2/3 PSHE syllabus.

Bridget Carrington

The House With Chicken Legs

Sophie Anderson, illus. Melissa Castrillon and Elisa Paganelli, pub. Usborne

When a house has a mind of its own, a very strong mind giving it a very strong will, what are the choices of its occupants? Not many as it turns out and Marinka is to learn. A house with legs is a house in charge and it is also a house with feelings. The problem is Marinka has feelings too, for a start she feels that she would very much like to have friends, just like other children her age, but the house never stays anywhere long enough for her to make a friend. It moves on without any warning and, to Marinka, without any care for her feelings.

Why? Why does the house move like this? It is all down to Marinka's grandmother, Baba Yaga, a spirit guide. Baba takes spirits from this world to the next and is determined that Marinka will follow in her footsteps, Marinka however has other plans for herself.

Beautifully written, lyrical, haunting and humorous this is a novel that will move your feelings into new dimensions as you adventure with Marinka to discover the possibilities the world has to offer.

Fresh and original, Sophie Anderson's storytelling is strong, and I was reluctant to have to pause at any point within the story, constantly wanting to be with Marinka, to travel with her, to share in her emotions, to be enveloped in this story's tenderness.

A fable and fairytale without the standard tropes this is a brilliant story that will intrigue and compel all its readers whilst satisfying their desire for a good story, strong characters and a great plot line.

Highly recommended.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Iguana Boy Saves the World With A Triple Cheese Pizza

James Bishop, illus. Rikin Parekh, pub. Hodder Children's Books

Having siblings who are superheroes is no fun if you are just an ordinary 9-year-old boy. Dylan desperately wants to have superpowers like his brother and sister, but when he does eventually get some all he can do is talk to Iguanas.

How on earth is this going to be of use in saving people?

When the supervillain Celina Shufflebottom, aka 'The Platypus Kid', kidnaps all the superheroes in London, it is up to Dylan and his Iguanas (all called Paul or Pauline) to try and save the day.

This is a funny and wacky story which gives a different twist to the concept of superheroes. It is also about sibling relationships and how having special powers does not mean that you are necessarily a kind and helpful person.

The villain, Celina, is fascinating because she takes the concept of 'not doing what she is told' to an extreme; in fact, she has no understanding of how relationships at home and at school actually work.

This is the first of a new series and it is bound to be popular with lovers of humorous stories. The illustrations are lively and add to the overall zany feel of the story. This is a great read particularly for KS2.

Margaret Pemberton

The Infinite Lives of Maisie Day

Christopher Edge, pub. Nosy Crow

Uncertainty can be one of the most frightening sensations - it certainly proves so for Maisie, who must process an overwhelming confusion when she opens her front door onto impenetrable darkness. No street left outside, no neighbours, no signs of life. Just the house. And no family left inside it.

Certainly not the happy birthday she had intended.

Maisie's situation worsens when she learns that the surrounding blackness may not be static: she will need to outrun it...

Moving through a series of difficulties more and more disorientating as time passes, this suspenseful story keeps Maisie adjusting to her home's new position, as it begins to behave in strange and unexpected ways...

With this newfound isolation comes both strength and panic. Being comfortable with our own reality is difficult at the best of times: anger and upset usually find a way of encroaching more regularly than we'd like. But never more so do they appear than in situations of extreme stress, and Masie works through frustration, sadness, desperation, and fury – her struggle to acclimatize offers a reminder that its ok to be overwhelmed.

Coping takes time.

In this space, resembling life as it once was but slowly consumed by darkness, time may be somewhat limited for Masie - but she carries on with the tumult of feelings and tries to unravel what lies behind the changes around her. There is plenty that Maisie does already know about her surroundings – she has a keen interest in science.

Threading together storytelling and science, this book shows their connection rather than isolating or ranking their fields. In turn, readers will probably find their own curiosity about the universe re-kindled – or fanned – and be tempted to seek out some physics books... But sometimes accepting uncertainty is also necessary. Indeed, Maisie's frantic attempts to find a way through this upheaval – and find her family – are intertwined with an alternate narration of Maisie's birthday. Family tensions must be juggled alongside pancakes and party food (sisters can be pretty tricky to comprehend), but it's not clear how these events fit and coexist with Maisie's struggles in the void. This lesson in suspense is valuable even as Maisie begins to find answers – the ending (if it may be called such) may leave you with an infinite number of emotions.

Jemima Breeds

Lady Mary

Lucy Worsley, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Author and popular historian, Lucy Worsley, spins an engaging tale of Mary Tudor's early life at court and how she must constantly brave the tumultuous outcomes of the almost whimsical interests of her father, King Henry VIII. Lucy Worsley's experience as Chief Curator at the Historic Royal Palaces allows her to easily imagine life at court and the intricacies of surviving during the period when Mary's mother, Catherine of Aragon falls out of favour with her King. The story begins with Mary sharing an intimate moment with her mother as they compose a letter to Mary's intended Charles of Anjou (later Charles V of France) and spans a period of 11 years. At the age of nine, Mary is still an innocent child who longs for a normal family relationship, the attention of her father and cares little for the inner workings of court politics. Her world practically changes overnight with the arrival of Anne Boleyn and her beguiling ways.

The story of Catherine's downfall and exile and its subsequent impact on Mary is entirely convincing. Catherine's earlier advice that 'Mary is a Spanish Princess' and assertion that Mary must become a strong, capable and determined young woman eases Mary's periods of long isolation from her mother and absence from the court. Her worries, which seemed unfounded at the time, materialize with breath-taking speed at some moments and at others, with torturous slowness. Mary is constantly questioning the actions of her father and the individuals who are supposedly there to support her but in many cases seem nothing other than glorified jailors. Friendships resulting from Mary's steadfastness, goodness and courage, combined with those loyal to Catherine and her religion, help Mary to bear the isolation and return to court after Anne Boleyn's own downfall.

The story was beautifully paced, full of intrigue and rich with historic information.

A must read for anyone who loves the intrigues of royal life during Tudor times.

Sheri Sticpewich

Max Champion and the Great Race Car Robbery

Alexander McCall Smith, illus. Kate Hindley, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Max's Grandad, Gus, used to make some of the best cars around and was successful at racing them, until his Ideas Book was stolen and his favourite car, Arabella, had to be abandoned in the Indian desert during a race. He still works in a small garage, and lives with Max, who loves to help in the garage, and Max's Mum, who works hard with her small catering company.

One day Max, cleaning a very dirty car, reveals the name Champion on the radiator grill - it was one of Grandad's, and Mum tells him the story of the loss of the Ideas Book.

Max is having a lot of bother with a bullying, cheating boy at school, Pablo Grabber, and soon discovers that it was another member of the Grabber family who was responsible for Grandad's misfortune. The Grabber family are rich, but unpleasant people, unlike the happy but poor Champions. When Mum gets a job making sandwiches at Grabber Mansion, Max seizes an opportunity to look around...

Of course, it all ends well, with Max, Mum and Grandad happy and the Grabbers reformed.

Alexander McCall Smith's range of writing for all ages is extraordinary and skillful, and this is an enjoyable read: a 'chapter book' for younger readers. Kate Hindley's cartoon-like illustrations work well, and this is recommended.

Diana Barnes

Planet Stan

Elaine Wickson, illus. Chris Judge, pub. Oxford University Press

Stanley Fox is aged eleven and is mad about space. He also likes quiet and bogey-free environments – and cake. His brother Fred is five. Fred likes dinosaurs, noise, eating bogeys, and cake. The local museum has a T-rex skeleton called Rory, which Fred is obsessed with and which has been in the museum for years.

The school attended by Stanley and Fred runs a science competition where the prize is a telescope. Stanley of course is desperate to win the prize. The museum is planning to dispose of Rory to make room for an exhibition on climate change. Fred of course is dead set on preventing the exile of his favourite dinosaur.

Can Stanley win the telescope? Can Fred save Rory from relegation?

Wickson has managed to depict her two protagonists as real and sympathetic, endearing to the reader from the first page.

Stanley spends a good deal of time and energy on saving his younger brother from disastrous situations, such as flushing a model of the Earth down a toilet.

Chris Judge's drawings, perfectly adapted to the text, add a refreshing and touching dimension. Less confident readers will find that the pictures serve to punctuate the text.

Rebecca Butler

Splash

Charli Howard, pub. Nosy Crow

Molly is a sensible girl, perhaps being bought up by your grandparents helps. She has one very best friend, Chloe, whom she adores and envies at the same time – after all Chloe has it all. A lovely family, parents who dote on her, good looks, a lovely figure. BUT and there is a big but, Chloe isn't always nice. In fact sometimes Chloe can be well, honestly, quite nasty. Still Molly wants to stay friends with Chloe for she, and their small group of friends will soon be going to join Year 7 in their new secondary school, and they need to stick together, be there for one another – don't they? Molly has other friends too. Friends at school and friends at her swimming club. Sadly, Chloe doesn't think too much of these friends and tries not only to convince Molly that swimming really isn't that cool but that neither are some of her friends.

Can Molly stand up to Chloe's jibes and comments? Can she be herself and do what makes her happy, can she see the friendship that is extended to her by those that look deeper than face value who don't see a 'fat' or 'chunky' girl but someone who is strong, fit, powerful and a very good swimmer? What will it take to learn that we are all made differently, for specific reasons and that we each need to be true to ourselves?

A powerful message gently conveyed in a truly charming and delightfully well-written story. Molly's voice and those of her true friends shines through and it made me, as an adult really think and take stock about how we consider ourselves and the opinions we have of others too. This is an important book about being true to yourself, listening to those around you who care about you and learning that we are each unique for very good reasons.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Storm-Wake

Lucy Christopher, pub. Chicken House

Moss and her father are the only inhabitants of a remote island, the only survivors of an epic flood that has destroyed the rest of the world and left them stranded in this corner of Earth. It is a place where beauty and danger live in close proximity and the swathes of scented and luminously beautiful flowers are complemented by rocky areas populated by dangerous lizards.

Moss' knowledge of life before the island is mostly based on Pa's stories and the books they salvaged from the wreck of their boat. Their life is measured by natural events and Pa's experiments with the flowers, which he believes can change and restore the natural course of nature.

The power of Pa's experiments is confirmed to Moss when two creatures emerge from the sea as if created by the stormy waters: a beautiful horse first and a boy with scaly, fish-like skin later. For the following years the three live together, until the relationship between Pa and Callan, the boy, breaks. Moss' loyalty is divided between Callan and her increasingly ill father, whose days are spent drifting in a sort of feverish and brooding mood. She is also torn between the wish to explore beyond the boundaries of the island, as Callan would like her to do, and her sense of duty towards Pa and his belief that nothing exists across the sea.

This fragile balance is broken by the arrival of two boys, whose boat has crashed against the island's rocks. The evidence that there is still life in the outer world and Callan's discovery of something that belongs to Pa and Moss' past, pushes the girl to probe her memories and to confront Pa.

If this book were to be compared to a painting, it would be one where images and emotions are summoned with few, effective brush strokes and a vivid palette of colours. Settings are richly depicted and what we know about the characters emerges in many cases from their observation of each other and from their dialogues.

At the edge between fantasy and adventure, *Storm Wake* is a book that challenges its readers and their imagination especially in the last, beautiful and emotionally rich pages.

Laura Brill

To the Edge of the World

Julia Green, pub. Oxford Children's Books

Jamie Mackinnon is a thoughtful, cautious boy, who has gladly left behind the mainland, and moved with his family to a small island on the Outer Hebrides. The island brings Jamie peace and a sense of belonging. His mother's family has history here, his grandfather is a boat builder. He revels in being the first person to trace steps on fresh-washed sand. It's a cold version of a tropical paradise. But life on the island still depends on tides and winds and currents and storms, and Jamie thinks about that a lot. Despite rushing to the beach every morning, he never goes in the sea, ever. For Jamie, the sea might be beautiful but it is also deadly.

Then he meets Mara, 'the wild lass': a fearless, independent 13-year-old who lives in a tiny battered old croft house with her terrier Django and her troubled artist mother Esther. Mara doesn't go to school; the sea is her tutor. She lives a seemingly carefree life, sailing her dinghy Stardust, roaming the island, and helping her mother sell painted pebbles to tourists. But her mother's self-imposed isolation means the community fill in what they don't know about the family, with suspicion and gossip.

Jamie is intrigued by Mara and her restless spirit, and to his surprise he reveals to her his secret fear of the sea. Mara doesn't judge him, she's pragmatic. She offers to teach Jamie to sail, and a friendship is formed. But Mara has her own secret. The authorities are threatening to send her away to school, so she hatches an escape: a long and treacherous journey across the waters to St Kilda. Nothing is going to stop her, not even Jamie, whose courage is tested beyond anything he could have ever imagined, thus setting the stage for a journey that celebrates adventure and friendship and gives a sobering lesson on the true sense of community.

This book is so exquisitely evocative, it's like putting a shell to your ear and hearing the sea roar back at you.

I am in the boat with Jamie, Mara and Django. I'm rocking gently on a tranquil ocean, crashing through a rip current. I'm hoisting the flapping sails and watching water catch the sunlight and glitter like crystals. I can taste the salt sea on my lips. I am trying not to fall overboard. I am looking at Mara, and I want to let go of my fear.

To the Edge of the World, is a captivating story that feeds the soul. It is an invitation for every child to reach inside and dream of adventure.

Matilde Sazio

Twelve Nights

Andrew Zurcher, pub. Puffin

It's Christmas Eve and Kay and Eloise's father is working late again. He's been working late in his lab, office or at a dig for most of the year and Mum has had enough. She ushers the girls into the car and heads off to Cambridge, determined to bring him home or find out what's going on. Upon arriving at the University, the night porter tells them he doesn't know Dr More (their father) and there's no record of a Dr More in the university's listings. Mum isn't about to give up, taking the girls to another part of the university only to find that their father's rooms are occupied by someone else. It's almost as if their father doesn't exist.

Back at home, Kay climbs up into her top bunk and finds a strange calling card on her pillow – from Will O de Wisp and Philip R.T. Gibbet, 'Removals.'

Later that night, Kay's sleep is disturbed by the sound of voices outside her window, and it's here that Kay and the reader meet Flip and Will, and the strange, magical adventure really starts.

The two characters that enter the girls' bedroom aren't human but some sort of wraiths, experts in 'removals', but it seems that in this instance they have made a mistake. They have left Kay and Eloise's

father's tooth behind (Kay had it in her pocket) and they've come back to retrieve it. People can't normally see wraiths so Flip and Will are surprised to discover that Kay can see and hear them. Despite it being Christmas Eve, the girls go on a journey with the wraiths, hoping to discover what has happened to their father.

Why has he been taken, and can they get back? Kay and Eloise travel with Flip and Will in a hot air balloon to a strange, magical realm called Bythinia, where a dark figure known as Ghast is taking control and gathering wraiths to move away from the old ways and to carry out his will.

The story itself focuses on or centres around stories and the power of their telling, retelling, imagination, plotting and mystery. Andrew Zurcher's writing style has multi-layered depths and is frequently beautiful and poetic.

I often hear teachers complain that some books read by their pupils don't challenge them enough as readers. This will definitely offer a challenge for the more able readers as they follow Kay and Eloise's adventures, but I feel they will be rewarded by the challenge.

Damian Harvey, @damianjharvey

Young Adult Book Reviews

The Astonishing Colour of After

Emily X R Pan, pub. Hachette Children's Books

Emily Pan's debut novel stretches to 108 chapters, a daunting prospect if they didn't vary between being as short as a single page or as long as eight, and 466 pages in total.

In these pages her fifteen-year-old narrator, Leanne, tries to cope with the very recent tragedy which left the 'mother-shaped hole' in her life, created by her mother's lengthy and painful descent into depression and finally suicide.

Leanne is mixed race - her mother Taiwanese, her rather distant, frequently absent, father white American - but her parents' relationship resulted in bitterness and estrangement from her Taiwanese grandparents. She and her best friend, Axel, also mixed race in a predominantly white community, share a passion for art. Events for them are seen synesthetically, the colours in their minds reflecting the emotions they are feeling.

Leanne is convinced that a red bird is visiting her, and sees this as her mother's spirit, encouraging her to seek the answers to her Taiwanese heritage, to 'remember' a past she can only experience through the memories of others.

Travelling with her still reluctant father to her grandparents' homeland, she discovers the Buddhist belief that from the time of death the spirit has 49 days in which to resolve their life, and Leanne feverishly seeks the truth behind her mother's depression and death. Still guided by fleeting glimpses of the red bird, she experiences flashbacks through which she gradually unravels her family story and finds resolution.

Pan's use of magic realism, coupled with Buddhist teachings and expressed through synaesthesia, creates an atmosphere in which the reader can feel as confused and lost as Leanne.

We move backwards and forwards through time, centred in the unfamiliar surroundings of Taiwanese life, while traumatically reviewing both her mother's life in Taiwan and later in the US, as well as her own apparently fractured relationship with Axel. Through these flashbacks, we perhaps develop a greater understanding of the culture and customs of Taiwan, and an insight into her mother and grandparents than we do of Leanne herself.

Not an easy read, but an original and ultimately rewarding one.

Bridget Carrington

The Breadwinner: A Graphic Novel

Based on the original book by Deborah Ellis and adapted from the feature film directed by Nora Twomey, pub. Oxford University Press

The Breadwinner: A Graphic Novel presents the courageous story of survival under Taliban rule in Kabul, Afghanistan in a new format. Based upon the award-winning original book by Deborah Ellis first published in 2000 and adapted from the 2017 released feature film directed by Nora Twomey and produced by Aircraft Pictures, Cartoon Saloon and Melusine Productions, *The Breadwinner* focuses on the daring exploits of Parvana, a girl masquerading as a boy, when her father is imprisoned by the Taliban and she becomes the breadwinner for her family.

Parvana is the hero of the graphic novel. She is resourceful, when going outside as a girl is too dangerous she decides to cut her hair and become a boy. Parvana shows great courage, refusing to accept the authority of the Taliban, and attempts to free her father from prison. She is persistent, willing to do whatever is necessary to feed her family and earn money for bribes, even the arduous work of making bricks. Her nemesis is Idrees. Idrees is the one who bullies Parvana's father Nurullah in the marketplace, puts him in prison and nearly reveals Parvana's true identity. In a few words Idrees shows his disrespect for the old order when Nurullah was his teacher and seems to epitomize the character of the new order of the Taliban: aggressive, irrational, and hateful.

The Breadwinner: The Graphic Novel deserves a number of readings to fully appreciate some of the subtle implications. For example, the novel begins with Parvana's father Nurullah trying to sell one of her dresses, a dress she has never worn and not likely to wear. Later Parvana sells this dress to an old man, missing some of his teeth, mistakenly thinking it is for his daughter, but the man corrects her and says it is for his wife. We never see the identify of his wife, standing behind him in a burka. The suggestion is that she is only a child. This too could have been the fate of Parvana.

The novel uses a comic strip layout with a primarily brown palette, such that the turquoise and red of Parvana's hijab for instance strikingly stands out. The browns seem to reflect the hard and oppressive life under the Taliban. Oppression is also shown in the human figures of men with hunched shoulders and the submissive posture of women and girls, all with cast down eyes. Moreover, the perspective of the artwork continually shows Parvana as a child, often looked down on as if from the viewpoint of an adult. This contrasts with the equality of Parvana and her friend, Shauzia now called Deliwari, taking the same risk as girls pretending to be boys to earn money.

This a story of a story: Parvana's story. Through Parvana, Deborah Ellis told the stories of many Afghan women and girls she interviewed in refugee camps in Pakistan and Russia. The graphic novel

also interleaves the breadwinner between the stories of Afghan's past invaders and Parvana's new story of hope, after she rescues her father. The story continues ... as do the people.

Simon Barrett

The Electrical Venus

Julia Mayhew, pub. Hot Key Books

With its menagerie of extraordinary animals - dancing geese, a mathematical pig and a poetic parrot - and freakish humans - a fire-juggling dwarf, a tumbling one-armed boy and a no-legged Hercules, Alex and Mim are part of a travelling sideshow, entertaining crowds and stealing from them. Their fortunes greatly increase with the appearance of Dr Fox and his knowledge of electricity, but so too do the sorrows of Alex and Mim for whom love seems an impossible dream.

The Electrical Venus is set in Georgian England, when scientists or so-called natural philosophers publicized their knowledge by entertaining royalty, benefactors and the general public with their latest discoveries. In the story Dr Fox creates a machine that generates electricity, giving shocks to the men who pay to kiss Mim's lips in her guise as 'The Electrical Venus.' Mim's central billing on the travelling sideshow changes everything. Alex has to take secondary role in the show and is no longer Mim's protector as well as seemingly losing her affections to Dr Fox. Mim sees this as an opportunity to better herself and gain an education. Sadly, promises are broken and dreams are shattered before the story can end happily.

Told from the perspectives of Mim and Alex in monologues - except for interruptions from George the parrot - the story progresses slowly. Often the same events are described twice by Mim and Alex. Additionally, the monologues richly describe both Mim's and Alex's thoughts and feelings, developing strong characters, but again this affects the pace of the book. Be warned that there is some swearing. Moreover, the multiple voices and texts divide the book into a number of acts, including billboards, a news article, script, an annotated drawing and a letter. This can be confusing. It may therefore be a challenging read and a book to persist with.

The Electrical Venus is a coming-of-age story in which Mim develops her confidence and understands her self-worth. It is a turbulent journey of unrequited love, false love, true love.

Simon Barrett

Big Bones

Laura Dockrill, pub. Hot Key

Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are frequently placed centre-stage in novels for young adults. By contrast, it is rare to find a novel, and a funny novel at that, which is centred on a teenager whose self-esteem is good, and who is really happy with her body image and her weight.

Bluebelle (BB) is sixteen and loves food. Not only does she love eating it, she also loves cooking it, and clearly spends most of her time thinking about it. When she has an asthma attack, she has to get medical advice, and as a result is told by the nurse that she is obese. On the surface this doesn't seem to bother her, but she very reluctantly agrees to keep a food diary over the school summer holiday, and from page eleven *Big Bones* is this diary. Whereas the nurse expects a list of what she eats and how much exercise she is taking, BB uses it to record her daily life, in short chapters, each of which is headed by a favourite food.

We learn a lot about her family: her sporty sister who is into free-running parkour; her loving but overworked Mum, who is worried by the separation she and BB's Dad have agreed; her actor/drama teacher Dad – a teacher because he's a failed actor. BB is determined to leave school and try to negotiate an apprenticeship at the coffee shop where she works part-time, but everything is changed when there is a serious family crisis. We see a chink in BB's confidence, a glimpse of her thirteen-year-old self, and begin to understand how the past three years have shaped her attitude to life.

After a rather slow start, Dockrill's novel develops into an intensely thoughtful portrait of a teenager who, on the surface, appears to have no worries about anything, but underneath is struggling to find her real direction in life.

Beneath the humour and bravado there's a lot for readers to think about, and valuable cues for discussions about self-esteem, body image and differing societal expectations for girls and boys.

Bridget Carrington

Children of Blood and Bone

Tomi Adeyemi, pub. Macmillan

Tomi Adeyemi's first novel was born out of her discovery of the mythology of her West African culture, her support for the Black Lives Matter movement, and her conviction that fantasy was woefully short of female and black heroes.

Her proposal for a novel encompassing all these aspects swiftly attracted both the publishing and the film world, and as a result we have *Children of Blood and Bone*, the first title in a fantasy trilogy set in an alternative Nigeria.

The book – over 500 pages long – charts Zélie’s quest to restore magic to the land’s ancient clans and overthrow the oppressive King Saran. A kingdom-wide genocide has wiped out magic, carried out by the king’s army. Those that still do have magic – maji – hide their powers, for fear of a return from King Saran’s troops. After a chance encounter leads Zélie to discover that magic is not dead but only dormant, and that she is the only one who can bring it back, she embarks on a journey to reawaken the ancient magic of the clans.

Adeyemi uses three narrators: Zélie herself, and the daughter and son of the King, Amari and Inan. The latter represent the differing treatment and expectations of female and male children in elite society but come to recognize and appreciate the racially different maji. However, there is insufficient stylistic differentiation between these three narrative voices to justify their use, and sometimes it would be difficult to identify the character, had not their name headed that chapter. Zélie herself is the strongest character, trained in a Bo-type martial art, and this gives rise to many typically fantasy genre episodes where she fights her enemies, often escaping on a giant leopard-like beast.

As we read we can see why the film rights were snapped up. Unfortunately, as a result, the author was heavily influenced by the cinematic wishes, increasing the book’s length by a third, which leads to unnecessary repetition and padding-out. Nevertheless, there is a compelling argument when viewed as a narrative of white western empire building and its ongoing aftermath.

Bridget Carrington

The Exact Opposite of Okay

Laura Steven, pub. Electric Monkey

Izzy O’Neill is eighteen, smart and self-deprecating, full of bravado and relentlessly wise cracking in the Lorelai Gilmore vein of verbal dexterity. Her ‘wildly inappropriate sense of humour’, she gets from her grandma, Betty, who has looked after her since she was orphaned as a child. They love each other fiercely. Betty works long hours as a pancake chef to make ends meet and Izzy knows she could never afford college. In fact, she wants to work so that Betty doesn’t have to. She loves writing and performing and when her teacher reads a script she has written, is persuaded to enter it into a competition – the prize is a college scholarship.

If this was Izzy’s only challenge, she would tackle it with gusto. However, the month that follows brings her to the brink of despair. Cut and pasted from her blog, Izzy chronicles a series of events that converge, propelling her into the starring role of her very own, international sex scandal.

Izzy claims she has a high sex drive; she has never been in a relationship but she likes sex. A lot. In one short space of time, she provides all the ammunition an anonymous, malicious and tech-smart creep needs to catapult her into a realm where anybody and everybody can slut-shame her with

impunity. The izzyoneillworldclasswhore blog, pages of photoshopped selfies of her performing sexual acts and fake confessions, kicks her into the public domain, condemned by politicians and religious organisations, not to mention those closer to home. It's a media feeding-frenzy. Laura Steven proceeds to examine with wit and compassion what it is to be a real teenage girl in a world with double standards. As Betty says, 'the fact that everyone is so damn interested in the sex life of an innocent teenage girl is more a reflection on them than you.'

The resolution is an analysis of self-respect and a powerful call to arms. The language and content mean that in all conscience you couldn't give the novel to younger teens, much as you'd want to. It's a hilarious, clear-sighted exploration of female sexuality and the people who, wrongly, think they have a stake in it. It is a terrific read!

Jackie Spink

The Eye of the North

Sinead O' Hart, pub. Stripes Publishing

Capturing a young reader's attention from the very first line is one of the most challenging aspects to writing an engaging and successful novel. *In Eye of the North*, Sinead O' Hart does just this with a witty, original and endearing writing style which is beautifully sustained throughout this enchanting tale of danger and adversity.

Emmeline Widget is not a usual heroine and, when we first meet her, it is her loneliness and sense of being totally unequipped for the world she inhabits which is most striking. When her parents mysteriously disappear and her life is endangered, she is shipped to the safety of an unknown guardian in Paris. Frightened and isolated, she befriends a stowaway called Thing, however their friendship is threatened by the villainous Dr Siegfried Bauer who kidnaps Emmeline as part of his evil plan to unleash a mythical monster from the frozen waters of the North.

O' Hart's writing twists and turns with tremendous pace as we are whisked to a strange and magical world with frozen lakes, airships, fantastical creatures and the terrifying Northwitch. But the true charm of this story lies in the authenticity of the characters and what they learn about themselves and each other. Yes, this is a thrilling story of danger and adventure. But it is also a story about the quest to find one's place in the world, to fit in, to feel loved and wanted and safe. In Emmeline and Thing, O'Hart beautifully captures the insecurities and fears of growing up. What is particularly heart-warming, however, is how both characters discover a resilience and resourcefulness which is a match for any monster – mythical or otherwise.

Paulie Hurry

Fragments of the Lost

Megan Miranda, pub. Penguin

Jessa has been tasked with clearing out and packing up her ex-boyfriend Caleb's room after a car accident took his life only a few months previously. What Jessa is yet to learn is that this room holds far more clues to his disappearance than his mother, the police or even Jessa herself could have believed.

Jessa is unable to shake the feeling that Caleb's mother somehow blames her for her son's death and worse, feels she has no way to prove otherwise. As Jessa attempts to physically and mentally pack Caleb away, she ends up doing quite the opposite. Revealing slowly more and more of someone she once believed she knew better than anyone else, finding more unresolved questions than answers, it appears this task will not provide her with the closure she longs for.

Whilst this book can feel as if it takes some time to get going, stick with it. Living Jessa's grief with her can feel as if things can never improve, just as it would for any teenage girl going through such a dreadful ordeal. However, the sit-bolt-upright-wide-eyed-don't-stop-reading moment will certainly hit, at which point it is a challenge not to devour the rest of the book in a single gulp.

As well as the twisting and turning, mysterious nature of the book, the characters themselves will keep you hooked. No character in this book is perfect - who is? - but it is this trait that will catch you changing allegiance, doubting what you thought you knew about the story and the complexities within. With precariously balanced family relationships and teenagers navigating the implications of romance alongside applying to university, this book effortlessly sows together an incredible spectrum of emotion; from grief to romance, guilt to pride, fear to joy, this is certainly one that will stay with you.

Harrie Gooch

I Have Lost My Way

Gayle Forman, pub. Simon & Schuster

Gayle Forman writes with the ability to make her reader feel that they are the ones experiencing the story unfolding. Her writing is very personal, very immediate and very powerful. If you chance to find her books I highly recommend them and this, her latest, should come with a box of tissues. It is not a sad and weepy book by any means, but it is a book that will tug at the heartstrings and have you reaching for the tissue as you dab your eyes.

Why?

The voices in this story resonate and will continue to do so, with every reader. From Freya who has lost her voice to Harun who has lost the love of his life and Nathaniel who has just lost everything, we learn about the power of fate and the importance of sharing loss.

It may not sound very significant, to have lost your voice, but for Freya it could be the end of an initially promising career as a singer. No singing voice means no music, no fans and no contract. The harsh reality of a controlling mother and a demanding manager soon hit home and Freya must find not only her voice but herself too.

To lose the love of one's life is dramatic and for Harun the loss is compounded by the fact that even having admitted to being gay was a huge step, add to this the complication of being Muslim and actually being one of Freya's fans too once their worlds entwine fate has a strong hand to play in more than one regard.

Nathaniel is perhaps the character we should feel the most for, yet he is the toughest and strongest of them all – in more ways than one after being fallen upon by a tumbling Freya! Alone in New York with nothing and no-one and therefore nothing to lose it is he who really brings the three characters together and between them a story of love, loss, longing and discover is about to unfold.

A powerful and compelling story with three strong narrators and a very personal voice that will draw even the most cynical reader in.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Me Mam. Me Dad. Me.

Written by: Malcolm Duffy, pub. Zephyr

Danny might only be fourteen but he knows a thing or two about life. He knows that playing football in the dark, with a black ball, is a bad idea. He knows that his girlfriend, Amy Reynolds, is brilliant and the third prettiest lass in his class. And he knows that he'll do anything to protect his mam. That's why he decides he has to kill her new boyfriend.

When Danny's mam meets Callum, she starts to change. Not quite sure what's happening, Danny turns to the internet for advice. He's never even heard the term 'domestic violence' and he's horrified when he finds out that two women a week are murdered by violent partners. Danny feels like he can't talk to anyone about what's happening at home. Angry, alone and afraid, he decides that the only person who might be able to help is his dad. He's never met his dad, he has no idea who he is but he knows he's got to find him.

Danny is just an ordinary kid from Tyneside; being a Geordie himself, it made sense for Duffy to set his first novel in the place he grew up. Danny's distinctive voice is, in my opinion, the novel's greatest success. It is fresh, honest, and utterly convincing.

While working as a creative director at Comic Relief, Malcolm Duffy met real women and children who had suffered as a result of domestic abuse. One boy, in particular, found it too difficult to talk about the horrors he had witnessed. It was this young boy who inspired *Me Mam. Me Dad. Me*. Stories like Danny's are important. Duffy explores the themes of domestic violence, isolation, and growing up with sensitivity, energy and heart. It's truthful but not too heavy so it would be an ideal, relatable read for teenagers of all ages.

Humorous and heart-breaking in equal measure, this coming-of-age story will have you hooked. I loved it.

Abby Mellor

Orphan Monster Spy

Matt Killeen, pub. Usborne

This is an intense, fast-paced, highly crafted narrative set in 1940's Germany. Sarah is a Jewish teenager bent on escaping to Switzerland, but then her mother crashes their car and things get complicated. The opening chapters play on the ambiguity of the play-acted relationship between Sarah and a zeppelin worker, absconder and spy, Captain Jeremy Floyd. Floyd persuades Sarah to enrol in an elite, brutal Nazi school in order to befriend Elsa, the daughter of the nuclear physicist, Hans Shafer. Shafer's laboratory fortress hides nuclear bomb plans Sarah must wrest from him, despite discovering he has an even darker secret.

The main characters are convincingly developed through nuanced writing, vivid accounts of their emotional lives and flashbacks, while the play-acting-to-impress theme is given a good airing. For the most part, Sarah's resilience and exceptional athletic, musical and intellectual skills are convincingly conveyed, but her tinkering with Shafer's nuclear device and the almost melodramatic final shoot out push credibility a little.

I must confess to being initially less than enthusiastic on encountering yet another WW2 YA novel. Yet, the detailed, emotionally genuine and historically accurate nature of the writing entirely won me over. The relevance of the racist theme is not lost on the author who writes:

'People often wonder how the German people allowed the Nazis to take power.'

With the secret deportation of UK Windrush citizens currently in the news and controversial immigration policies, we have the makings of a parallel all too credible and alive.

On the final page, despite her extensive, harrowing experiences, Sarah agrees to accompany Floyd back to Berlin to continue to spy on behalf of the allies. So, a further adventure will appear, Kileen explains, in 2019.

Trevor Arrowsmith

Outwalkers

Fiona Shaw, pub. David Fickling Books

Outwalkers is a chilling story of a future authoritarian England that, under the guise of protecting its people, has turned against its citizens, computer chipping them from birth to keep them under constant surveillance. There is no freedom or compassion in this England.

Orphaned children are sent to a Home Academy where a mother and father figure rule with iron cruelty. Jake, escaping from the Academy, heads back to his former home where he is sure neighbours will help him but they betray him. Rescuing his dog, Jet, who has been left to die, Jake manages to get away.

Accidentally meeting with a gang of children who are Outwalkers, children who have cut out their computer chips so they cannot be traced, Jake eventually becomes one of them. The hatred of the authorities for those who oppose them is terrifying, designating some as Lowlifers and killing others. A wall, cutting England off from the freedom of Scotland, is heavily guarded but as Jake, his dog Jet, and the other Outwalkers set off for Scotland, to avoid capture by the armed and deadly government forces pursuing them, they are taken to London by a sympathetic lorry driver. There are brilliant and deeply disturbing scenes both in the city and in the Underground.

This novel, with its overtones of 1984, has great clarity, interspersing grim realities with the tenderness of friendship. The poster advertising 'BREXIT – THE MUSICAL' strikes a welcome note of sardonic humour in the disturbing violence of the scene in which it appears.

Do they make it to Scotland? The journey to find out is a roller coaster of tense excitement and full-on apprehension but a journey worth making.

Gwen Grant

Piecing Me Together

Renée Watson, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Jade has a scholarship to a prestigious private school across town in Portland, Oregon. She knows she should be grateful, but it's hard to leave your friends and cross town every day to somewhere you don't fit in. All the girls at St Francis have housekeepers, and Jade's mother works as one. When Jade is offered a place on the woman-to-woman mentoring scheme for 'at risk' teens, she hesitates to accept it. She is fed up with being something broken, something that needs to be fixed. What she really wants is a place on the Spanish trip; a chance to give rather than receive. And at first, Jade's mentor seems really flaky. But with a college scholarship promised at the end of it, it is impossible to refuse.

Piecing Me Together is a thoughtful and reflective story about what it means to be different, to be black and poor in a world of privilege. About what it's like to leave home whole every morning and be broken into tiny pieces by the world every day. The narrative is not story-driven as much as idea-driven and analytical, but it is moving and will make any teen reader think and think again about their lives and the lives of others around them.

Marie-Louise Jensen

Marie-Louise Jensen is the author of *historical fiction for teens and younger fiction* via Fiction Express.

Renegades

Marissa Meyer, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

Nova is a prodigy, a human being born with, or later developing, a super power. She is also an Anarchist, no different from a Renegade, except for the belief that people should be responsible for their own lives, not rely upon some superhero to save them.

The Anarchists, rebelling against centuries of fear, mistreatment and persecution of prodigies, used their superpowers to topple Governments, bringing chaos as authority crumbled and street gangs took control. The Renegades became the hope of Gatlon City, using their superpowers to fight against the Anarchists and the street gangs. The Anarchists lost. The street gangs broke up. Slowly the Renegades began to restore peace and order, rebuilding the city and restoring trade and relations with the rest of the globe. Twenty years on, the few remaining Anarchists including Nova plot vengeance.

Renegades goes beyond any easy separation of superheroes and supervillains. Nova's Anarchist nom de plume, Nightmare, is public enemy number one and as *Insomnia*, Nova is the newest Renegade recruit. She remains committed to her family of Anarchists, but develops friendships with her Renegade teammates and more than that with her team leader, Adrian Everhart. Meanwhile, Adrian, the most recognizable Renegade in Gatlon City, masquerades as the Sentinel, a person of unconfirmed

allegiance. He is determined to bring Nightmare to justice but is falling in love with Insomnia. Events conspire, threatening to expose them, creating tension throughout the story.

In the book, Nightmare is the voice of anarchy. She speaks to Adrian, calling for greater personal responsibility and people taking control of their own lives. Moreover, the Council of the Renegades seem unable to stop extending their control or to meet the demands of ordinary people, becoming a megalithic monster of bureaucracy. The story also explores the contradictions in anarchism as the Anarchists fail to co-ordinate and act out a shared plan when individuals act independently and in pursuit of their own interests. Ironically, Nova seeks vengeance because the Renegades arrived too late to stop her family dying.

Renegades is the first in a two-book series. Despite the dominance of the Renegades, by the end of the first book, Nova seems to have discovered a way of re-addressing the balance. Moreover, there is a huge conflict of interest within the central characters of Nova and Adrian and a seemingly impossible rift should they find out about their alter ego. The first book finishes on a cliff-hanger, revealing a secret thought to be dead and buried.

Simon Barrett

Storm-Wake

Lucy Christopher, pub. Chicken House

This novel is a lyrical homage to *The Tempest* by a writer who knows the play intimately. Written in five acts, the novel focuses on the experiences of Moss, the daughter character, and Callan, the Caliban figure. It explores Moss's childhood and her relationship with her father and Callan before the play begins which Shakespeare hints at in Prospero's speeches.

Moss has lived, for as long as she can remember, on what her Pa tells her is the last remaining island in the world, safe from 'the flooding'. It is a fantastical isle full of Shakespeare's 'sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not' where Moss's father experiments, nurturing and eating the magical storm flowers which create storms around the island and bring flotsam to its coves. Feeding on the stories he gives them, these flowers may even conjure spirits from the sea and one day, Pa tells Moss, could even bring back the world. When two boys from the outside world wash up on the island's shores, Moss has to face further revelations which throw her understanding of reality into question. Christopher has created an immersive world, with its own poetic, evocative language - a modern, onomatopoeic dialect and dreamlike imagery. The two young characters, growing up under the intense, visionary tutelage of Pa, evoke sympathy from the reader and it is deeply satisfying to look at the story through their experiences.

This is also a gripping read. Through creating a world where reality and imagination merge, Christopher keeps the reader guessing, trying to unravel the truth of Moss's origins and the darker undercurrents that run through the dreamy idyll.

As a lover of *The Tempest*, I found it an absorbing tribute to the atmosphere created by that dreamlike fantastical tale of storms, loss, and a young woman's first experience of falling in love.

Saira Archer

WaR: Wizards and Robots

will.i.am and Brian David Johnson, pub. Penguin Books

Gellar is a teenage wizard born over six hundred years ago and Kaku is an academic robot from the future. Both believe the key to their survival is Ada, a sixteen-year-old technology whizz whose mum is entering the world's biggest robot building competition. Traditionally sworn enemies, can Gellar and Kaku find Ada and unite to face the alien invasion set to destroy them all?

When I first heard that will.i.am had written a book, I was dubious to say the least. I knew he was a brilliant lyricist with a love for all things random but I had no idea if he could cut it as a YA author. Well, he's certainly proved himself, in my opinion. Together with renowned futurist Johnson, will.i.am has created a time-travelling, genre bending, adventure packed novel that (despite being about as wacky as a pair of will.i.am's sunglasses) had me hooked.

The concept of time travelling robots and wizards, with a few aliens thrown in for good measure, is frankly bizarre but it worked for me and it felt new and fresh. The wizards had limitations which, although a little frustrating, made them a more even match for the robots and the addition of Ada helped to balance the action. The story is a little convoluted at times; younger readers especially might find the subplots and time jumps confusing. There were passages I found myself re-reading just so I could make sense of what was going on. It felt a little like the writers had a few separate ideas for a book and couldn't choose between them so decided to cram them all into one novel. I've still got quite a lot of unanswered questions so I'm hoping there is a sequel.

Ultimately, this is a fun, fast-paced, futuristic adventure with bells on. If you like science-fiction or fantasy, you should give it a go!

Abby Mellor

The Wicked Deep

Shea Ernshaw, pub. Simon & Schuster

Set in Oregon, where the author lives, this story will hook the reader with its intriguing premise. Penny Talbot lives with her emotionally frail mother on an island close to the harbour town of Sparrow, where every summer marks an anniversary that brings death to local teenagers. Two hundred years ago, three young women – the Swan sisters – were suspected of witchcraft and drowned; they take revenge by inhabiting the bodies of teenage girls, each of whom lures a young man into the sea to be killed. The drowning of the sisters is not only commemorated but re-enacted each year, bringing curious tourists.

Only Penny can discern where a Swan sister has taken temporary residence, so every teenage girl is suspected until the three victims have met their fate. Penny soon knows where two of the sisters are, but who'll be taken over by the third? Newcomer Bo, who moves to Penny's Lumiere Island to look after the lighthouse and orchard, seems to be an ally; but in fact, Penny knows little about him, other than that his brother has died. Of course, as their feelings deepen into love the chances increase of Bo becoming the sisters' next victim.

I have to say that the over-writing irritates. There are enough speech verbs to weary a SATS examiner (speakers bark, chirp, squeak, coo, amend, clarify, screech, praise and pose) and there's excessive underlining that shouldn't have survived the editing process: "Don't tell me,' he says, holding up a finger in the air as if to stop me from giving away my name before he's had time to figure it out on his own."

The author seems less at home in the 19th century sections that intersperse the present-day story, and a big plot twist comes at the expense of stylistic integrity. But details are cleverly woven in, and there's plenty to attract teenage readers: the summer coastal setting, paranormal thrills, friendships and rivalries, loyalties, and betrayal, shifts in identity and finally the redemptive power of love.

Linda Newbery

Linda Newbery's *Girls for the Vote* (which first appeared as *Polly's March*) is published by Usborne

Non-fiction Book Reviews

Ada Lovelace: The Making of a Computer Scientist

Christopher Hollings, Ursula Martin & Adrian Rice, pub. Bodleian Publishing

It is so great to see more and more titles on bookshop shelves shouting loudly and proudly about women of the world who have broken the mold and fought to be equal and work alongside men in every job possible. *Ada Lovelace: the making of a computer scientist* is a detailed factual book that delves deeper into one woman's life and her passion for mathematics and science in the 1800s.

Ada was lucky in that she was born into a family that supported her education, even though this had to be done through private study with her mother, private tutors and by correspondence - letters, imagine the wait! – because school and university were not an option in the early nineteenth century. The daughter of Lord Byron and Anne, Isabella was imaginative and intelligent and it is lovely to read quotes from her letters that clearly show her belief that anything was possible:

“As soon as I have brought flying to perfection, I have got a scheme about a ...steam engine which, if ever I effect it, will be more wonderful than...steam carriages, it is to make a thing in the form of a horse with a steam engine inside so contrived as to move an immense pair of wings...”

This book includes photographs of Ada's many letters and diagrams and her various sources of information, including her governess and her tutor in mathematics, Augustus De Morgan. There are sketches, portraits and photos of the people and objects in her life that influenced and inspired her to explore key mathematical questions, all beautifully presented: it really is a thoughtfully laid out book perfectly capturing Ada's life and journey.

Ada mixed with Victorian London's social and scientific elite including Mary Somerville, Charles Dickens, and Charles Babbage. Babbage devised the computing machines that fascinated Ada and inspired her to create a mathematical formulae also known as the 'first program.' Ada died young, at 36, but left behind her ideas and writings on the principles of computing (the 'first program') – and even ideas on artificial intelligence – that are coming into realization today.

Ada went as far in her studies as a woman of her time was able, if not further than most would have ever thought possible. Had she been a man, De Morgan observed:

“Had any young (male) beginner, about to go to Cambridge, shewn the same power, I should have prophesied...that they would have certainly made him original mathematical investigator, perhaps first-rate eminence.”

Ada Lovelace: the making of a Computer Scientist is a satisfying hardback book, the story of a determined woman within it. It is the first popular account of Ada's scientific education, and her educational journey: how and what she learned. Many of the letters shown are previously unpublished. This historical book will hopefully soon be in all schools and libraries for study and inspiration.

Anja Stobbart

Ada Twist's Big Project Book for Stellar Scientists

Andrea Beaty, illus. David Roberts, pub. Abrams

Ada Twist's big project book for stellar scientists is a very welcome follow-up to the fabulous *Ada Twist Scientist* picture book with illustrations by David Roberts returning too: Ada and her friends pop up on various pages to aid the reader in their scientific explorations. There is plenty of colourful detail, spaces to write answers, scribble pictures and keep jotting down ideas even after having solved the puzzles. Why? Because scientists don't stop at the first answer – they always dig deeper...

Author, Andrea Beaty, and the team behind the original picture book have created a STEM project book based around the popular *Ada Twist* in a bid to satisfy curious young minds and, seeing how much my 8-year-old loved it, I think it works!

Most children are constantly asking, 'Why?', searching for answers, and usually conducting random experiments too – be it building a tower as high as possible to pouring vinegar onto baking powder. They are all experimenting with science! *Ada* can help, and I'm happy to say, give them some new ideas to play with.

The story of *Ada Twist* can be read at the very beginning of the book, which is a lovely touch and then we are taken through the things *Ada* collects, or a 'Scientist's Treasure,' the reader is even shown how to keep these treasures tidy and safe (any help on how to keep a room tidy is to be applauded). There are word searches (paleontology, hypothesis but two of the words included), a question tree, ladybug facts, and an investigation on Matter. We continue into atoms, plants and seeds then onto weather and climate. Budding scientists will solve everyday mysteries, and by working through these enticing pages the hope is that children will come to think more critically about the world around them, hopefully asking more questions. Climate change is highlighted towards the end of the book and the reader asked, "What can you do to help?"

The list of inspiring scientists are mainly women, apparently this is much needed detail as a YouGov survey has stated that most adults in the UK are unable to name one living female role model in science or other STEM subjects. Andrea Beaty is making a fabulous point.

Ada can help children now grow up better informed: this is an empowering and child-friendly project book that I can imagine being used in the classroom as well as at home. Next time you are buying more vinegar, add Ada Twist's big project book for stellar scientists to the list too!

Anja Stobbart

An Atlas of Imaginary Places

Mia Cassany, illus. Ana de Lima, pub. Prestel Publishing

This unusual and beautifully illustrated atlas transports the reader into a fantastical world that nestles between reality and dreams. Children will discover mountains that grow upside-down, paper boats that transform into donut and cake islands, a city that floats on a whale, animals that change in appearance every time they sneeze and volcanoes that spit out bubblegum lava.

Author, Mia Cassany, has created the ideal picture and non-fiction book for older 5+ readers that will spark every child's imagination. The pastel-coloured illustrations by Ana de Lima are jam-packed with interesting and thought-provoking images. The reader needs time to explore and think about each spread as they sail on their wondrous journey through the *Atlas of Imaginary Places*.

I believe this book will make a great teaching resource, as each spread could be used as a story starter, as well as inspiring art creations and displays in the classroom.

The maps on the end papers are ingenious. They encourage the children to develop not only their imagination but their observation skills.

A great book for the class book corner and the ideal book for sharing with your child before bedtime.

Anita Loughrey, www.anitaloughrey.com

The Coral Kingdom

Laura Knowles, illus. Jennie Webber, pub. Words & Pictures

'Come and see the coral reef, beautiful beyond belief. From up above you'd hardly know so much is going on below...' Dive under the sea and take a swim around the glorious coral reef with the wondrous animals that live there.

The Coral Kingdom is a very special book indeed. Firstly, it's absolutely beautiful. Perhaps one of the most beautiful books I've ever seen. Jennie Webber's detailed illustrations and kaleidoscope colours are nothing short of magic. The artwork makes us appreciate the rich beauty of the coral reef and the

story helps us understand why we need to save it. Laura Knowles' gorgeous rhyming text is the perfect accompaniment to Webber's stunning illustrations.

Not only a joy to read aloud, but it also introduces young readers to the important topic of coral bleaching and conservation in an interesting and accessible way.

It's non-fiction but feels like a story book. The pull-out information page at the end is nice additional touch which you'll appreciate if, like me, you have a child that gobbles up facts like a shark gobbles fish.

I loved everything about this book and can't recommend it highly enough. Get your tentacles on it now.

Abby Mellor

Journeys: Tales of Travel and Trailblazers

Jonathan Litton, illus. Chris Chalik, Dave Shephard, Jon Davis, Leo Hartis, pub. 360 Degrees

Journeys is divided into four sections covering adventures and expeditions across water, land, ice and snow, with the last featuring men and machines.

It is a large-format book with buff-coloured pages and well-spaced out text broken up with sub-headings, pen and ink illustrations, and maps, all of which match the historical nature of the book very well. Its timeline spreads from the 6th century through to modern day ventures into space and the moon landings.

Each section begins with a short explanation putting the topography into perspective and is followed by several double-page spreads spanning a specific exploit or journey. There are short biographies of adventurers and travellers from the well-known such as Amundsen and Scott through to the lesser known such as Zhang Qian, a Chinese explorer who brought back the first records of the Ancient Silk Road.

The book has a multi-cultural focus covering the whole world and does not just look at travellers from Europe. Women adventurers are mentioned although, understandably more so in the last section, but there are references to women who are known to have had an impact such as Sacagawea, a Native American woman who was instrumental in the success of Lewis and Clark's expedition across the US. There is little said about the effect travellers had on indigenous peoples with only brief statements such as "James Cook was a rather forceful chap" and that not all these encounters were peaceful.

This book would be a good introduction to anyone interested in travel and exploration as well as a starting point for further research, exploring each adventure more fully, and looking at its influence and impact.

Barbara Band

Migration: Incredible Animal Journeys

Mike Unwin, illus. Jenny Desmond, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Each spread of this illustrated non-fiction book talks us through the migration of twenty different animals from the hump-back whale to the green turtle. There are actually twenty-one incredible animal journeys included in the book if you count the swallows in the introduction.

You can follow the emperor penguin through snow, ice and bitter temperatures; watch as the great white shark swims 10,000 km in search of seals; track huge herds of elephants, on their yearly hunt for water and be amazed at the millions of red crabs, migrating across Christmas Island.

Incredible Animal Journeys is a larger-than-A4 hardback book, which makes it ideal for sharing and discussing together. There are hundreds of facts and interesting snippets of information on each of the animals and is a credit to international travel writer, Mike Unwin. My first impression was the font was too small but as I read the book I realized this made it easier for the writing to fade into the background and for the reader to concentrate on the beautiful watercolour-painting illustrations whilst imagining each animal's migration journey.

Incredible Animal Journeys is the kind of book a child will treasure forever.

Anita Loughrey, www.anitaloughrey.com

My Dad is My Uncle's Brother: Who's Who In My Family

Joe Lyward, pub. Thames & Hudson

Families today can be complicated. This book describes the relationships between different family members with the explanation that "we all have different names because we all mean different things to each other".

The illustrations are simplistic, showing people as a variety of coloured shapes with heads and legs. The text is big and bold, and there is a lot of white space on the page enabling the reader to think about the concepts being described and the links between them. Each page introduces a new relationship until, eventually, the whole double spread is covered with an assortment of family

members of all shapes and sizes. This is a wonderful way of introducing the notion of families to children; it features friends who we call “aunties” as well as boyfriends of uncles.

I found myself working out the links in my head as I read the book and really didn't know what the last relationship would be called; however, children seem to naturally accept the extended families they live in and would find it fun to create their own family tree from this book.

Barbara Band

My First Piano Book

Genevieve Helsby, illus. Jason Chapman, pub. Naxos Books

My First Piano Book is a delightful book that is, quite simply, the whole package – or shall we say, two books in one? It walks children and their parents through the subtleties of the piano with some delightful animal characters at the helm thanks to illustrator, Jason Chapman. This colourfully designed book has been placed on bookshelves to give parents the opportunity to keep music going in their little one's lives.

Part 1: Why Is the Piano So Special? introduces the reader to various composers, a brief history and then also – maybe this is the cherry on top? – a CD attached to the book (or an audio link online) so you and your child can listen to the composer discussed and answer questions about the music they are listening too so as to begin to understand the piano and it's many possibilities:

J.S Bach Prelude in C Major

Listen: This music has no big crashes or fancy twiddling. It grows gently like a flower, settling peacefully at the end.

Question 1: Does the music: a. Stop and Start, or b. Keep going at the same speed?

The questions, the audio tracks and the simply, written explanations about the composers and how they liked to write music gently open up the world of the piano to whoever picks up this book. Bach didn't even have a piano! And he still wrote amazing pieces that have stood the test of time.

This first half covers the differing music a piano can create: how it can 'sing', how it can be 'Jazzy', how music paints a picture, how a piece of music can describe something, and of course, music can be 'Just Music,' and not be about anything at all. The characters - all animals – lead the reader through the first half of the book, essentially encouraging the reader to gather together some essential elements of information about the piano in a bid to understand its depth and breadth.

Part 2: How Do I Play It? Presents 12 easy to follow pieces all of which cleverly relate to our animal friends that have led us through the book. Each piece can be played along to the accompaniment on the cd or audio track, each reflecting the character of the animal.

The author is adamant that the piano can be for everyone and *My First Piano Book* sets out to try and make this a possibility. If you have access to a piano, parent and child can learn together or renew long forgotten lessons. There are lots of fun and interesting historical ‘tit bits’ in this book that can be read together, and there is no pressure to rush either.

Genevieve Helsby has done a great job of essentially creating a primary school level book which gives children aged 4 to 9 the opportunity to learn to play, alongside a parent, with the hope that as they progress through the pages that love of music will have become well and truly instilled.

Anja Stobbart

Now Make This. 24 DIY Projects by Designers for Kids

Curated by Thomas Barnthaler, pub. Phaidon Children’s

Bringing together 24 of the world’s leading designers *Now Make This* is a unique book, a unique project and a great idea. If there is a child in your family or your life who considers themselves to be a budding designer, who always takes an interest in how things are made or is always trying to make something then put this book into their hands!

Not only does this book provide practical hands-on activity it gives knowledge too. Want to know how to make a balancing sculpture? Turn to page 36 for an introduction to the project and the designer behind the idea, discover, before you have even started, how many different forms of this particular project there are, take a look at the accompanying pictures then turn the page.

Now for step two (step one was reading about the project). The tools required. A pictorial guide to the tools tells you what they are and will help to understand the project – visualizing the equipment needed is a great help. Next comes the instructions, step-by-step, with diagrams. That is it. The rest is up to you.

From the simple and classic sock puppet and cd spinner and delightful hermit crab – we all love making these – to the more complex Fishnet Lamp, sitting stool and playhouse every project gives an indication of cost and time needed as well as indicating whether adult help might be required. Templates at the back of the book complete the offering.

A fabulous book for budding designers, for homework help, for anyone who loves working with objects found around the house and making something a little bit different, this book will absorb children (and probably a few adults) for hours.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Secrets of the Mountain

Libby Walden, illus. Richard Jones, pub. Caterpillar Books

‘Our mountain watches over us – steadfast and strong...’ is the refrain which opens and closes this sumptuous book.

The reader is invited to discover the secrets of the mountain, journeying from the peaks to the plains, watching how its world changes as day turns to night. The lyrical, descriptive text is accompanied by panoramic scenes which show open vistas whilst other pages focus on more close-up detail of the animals and plants that call the mountain landscape home. The chalky illustrations are suffused with colour, from the glow of dawn through the warmth of the day to the blaze of sunset, followed by the radiance of the rising full moon as the night lengthens. There is still plenty of activity as the nocturnal creatures come out to feed and hunt.

Whilst not all the animals, insect and birds depicted are named in the text, clever use is made of the end papers as a visual glossary, featuring thumbnail illustrations.

A lovely book to introduce young readers to the wonder of nature, exploring a different habitat and one which would inspire further research.

Jayne Gould

Stories For Boys Who Dare to be Different

Ben Brooks, illus. Quinton Winter, pub. Quercus

Stories for Boys Who Dare to be Different profiles more than 100 boys and men, many who have overcome personal challenges and circumstances, who have made the world a better place for all. The diversity of the stories is astonishing, and even within any particular category, includes varied and interesting individuals. Stories of artists, includes the artist and human right activist Ai Weiwei, Grayson Perry and Salvador Dali, one of the most iconic artists of the twentieth century. There are musicians, and it is not often that a list of musicians can include Frank Ocean, Rain, Stormzy and Ludwig Van Beethoven, who wrote new music every day even after he lost his hearing. In addition, there are a number of scientists, such as Carl Linnaeus and Galileo as well as the recently deceased Stephen Hawking, and sportsmen across a range of pursuits: athletics (Derek Redmond), boxing (Muhammad Ali), football (Lionel Messi) and swimming (the Paralympian Achmat Hassiem). Finally, there are individuals who defy categorization, for example, Chelsey ‘Sully’ Sullenberger who achieved the impossible - landing a passenger aeroplane on the Hudson River in 2009.

Many of the names are likely to be instantly recognizable to the readers, such as the former USA president Barack Obama, codebreaker extraordinaire Alan Turing, and the American inventor Thomas Edison. Other names are less familiar, but their stories fascinating nonetheless. Boyan Slat, for example, became the youngest person in 2014 to receive the title of 'Champion of the Earth' for creating an ocean cleaner to collect up waste plastic from the world's oceans. A favourite of mine is Dan Kraus, who established a rescue service for cats that get stuck in high places, usually when it is dark and stormy.

Then literally there are the unknowns, such as the Tankman. This man, and no-one knows his name, stood with two shopping bags in front of a row of Chinese tanks heading towards the student protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989. I remember the news footage showing the man then repeatedly stepping to one side, stopping the tank as tried to go around him, until the driver turned off its engine.

Each story is told in a double spread with Ben Brooks' masterful summary of an individual's achievement and an accompanying bold illustration by Quinton Winter, portraying the person with some contextual detail about their life. For example, the illustration of Iqbal Masih, campaigner for the rights of child slaves, brilliantly shows Iqbal escaping his chains and running away from the carpet owner, out of the carpet factory door. In addition, Louis Braille's illustration is appropriately pixelated emulating the small dots that make up the system of writing called Braille used around the world.

Every reader will be able to find stories that interest them in *Stories for Boys Who Dare to be Different*. Hopefully it will encourage them to find out more about these inspirational boys and men and the contribution they have made to our world.

Simon Barrett

Tallest Tower Smallest Star

Kate Baker, illus. Page Tsou, pub. Big Picture Press

Subtitled 'a pictorial compendium of comparisons', this is an elegantly produced volume sure to engage the mind of any enquiring child and indeed adult. The illustrations, with their quirky Victorian style, are designed to be pored over, with a multitude of interesting facts and figures accompanying them.

Double page spreads explore a range of subjects including the most extraordinary creatures that have ever lived, feats of engineering from trains to towers, great lengths and speeds and out into the stars and galaxies. In a large format, this title joins the growing number of design-led information books which are transforming this field of publishing.

With so much to discover, this will keep the reader absorbed and eager to discover more.

Jayne Gould

The Walkabout Orchestra. Postcards From Around the World

Chloé Perarnau, pub. Wide Eyed

The maestro and his assistant have a big problem. The orchestra have an important concert to play but their musicians have all gone on holiday! Can they find them using clues from the postcards they have sent?

From Iceland to Portugal, Egypt to Greece, take a trip around the world and learn about all of the different instruments found in an orchestra.

A real celebration of different countries and cultures, this book has lots for its reader to discover along with the musicians. This is the kind of book that encourages kids to ask questions and takes them beyond its pages to somewhere entirely new.

Chloé Perarnau graduated from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, in 2012. *The Walkabout Orchestra* is her first book and it is absolutely beautiful. Full of whimsy, charm and style, it feels both timeless and a little bit hip. Each double page spread delights in its detail.

We've found new things to talk about every time we've read it (which has been a lot).

A classier and more cultured, orchestral version of *Where's Wally?*, *The Walkabout Orchestra* is a book to be discovered, treasured and enjoyed time and time again.

Abby Mellor

An interview with Cath Howe

One beautiful, sunny May evening found friends, family and colleagues gathering for a special launch party hosted by *The Alligator's Mouth* Richmond's charming children's book shop. We were there to raise a glass and toast a brilliant new children's book author, Cath Howe, and her fantastic debut novel, *Ella on the outside*, published by Nosy Crow. Natalie J. McChrystal Plimmer's review of the book can be read on the Junior reviews page.



Cath is no stranger to writing, she has done lots of it but until, now it has not been published and it has been primarily in the form of monologues and duologues for children to perform in a school setting.

Cath is a teacher by profession and specialised in coaching children to speak aloud with confidence. Her background was drama teaching in primary schools. She told me that having tried out secondary she soon wanted to be back in primary and that, in different roles, has been where she has stayed and where she is happiest.

When a school Cath where she was working needed a play, she wrote one. This was such a

success that she found herself writing more and more even doing school festivals and winning awards.

The secret of her success is to keep it lively, keep it fun. Cath continues to enjoy drama and its associated writing but now additionally works with small groups of children reading, writing and performing. In addition, she is now of course a published author with one book in print, another finished and being edited and a third underway.

Cath is inspired by her own experience and what she calls some of her own personal baggage – some of the incidents

Ella experiences are Cath's own memories, others are drawn from examples she has seen during her years as a teacher - Cath believes it is all about being a child who goes under the radar and needs to build confidence. She also draws inspiration from her own family, one of her children worked for a short time for prisons and saw the impact of children visiting their parents in jail and learning about how the inmates wanted to give something to their own children.

Family is pivotal too in Ella's story. Cath did a lot of watching of families to get the tone just right, sharing snippets of the story and ideas with her reading group to receive feedback. She also has a great editor! Lots was written and lots was taken out as it was too sad and emotional for a children's book. The process

however has helped Cath learn how to hone her story and pitch it for her audience.

Cath has plenty more ideas for stories bubbling away, one book in print and at least two more to follow. There is no rest for Cath and she is continuing to work with schools and children on the drama, writing scripts and giving children the confidence to perform.

Cath is a tour-de-force, positively changing children's lives in small and very personal ways in her work and now by publishing books. I hope her enthusiasm and insight will touch even more people, enriching them as she did me in the short time we spent together.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

What on earth is the *Where in the world?* series?

When the latest in the Where in the world series published by Dorling Kindersley came in the post, Armadillo's Simon Barrett had to find out more about the concept and production of this fantastic series with its cool 3-D graphics, themed according to the subject of the map, and high quality images, showcasing fascinating physical and human features around the globe.

“What are you working on at the moment?” my friends asked me, a senior editor at DK.

“Weird stuff on maps.”

Called *What's weird on earth*, this is the fourth in a brilliant series of books that show all kinds of things on maps. But what is it about, and where did it come from? Here's what you need to know.

It's all about the map.

The original book, *What's where in the world* (called *Where on earth* in the US), created the concept of showing where things are on maps – but going above and beyond the concept of an atlas. This was to be a reference book covering topics such as hurricanes, endangered animals, billionaires, ancient empires, tallest buildings,

rollercoasters... (I won't list all 90 maps.)

What happened when in the world (US: *When on earth*) followed. This delved into history, from the ancient world through medieval times right up to the 21st century, showing where battles were fought, where pirates patrolled, and where space rockets were launched. It maps ancient empires, shows the spread of the Industrial Revolution, and plots the expedition trails of the American frontiersmen.

What's where on earth atlas seemed a natural third choice. A slightly more conventional content, a continent-by-continent exploration of the world, was reinvented with maps showing the political borders, landscape, climate, wildlife, landmarks, and a beautiful rendering of the land

by night, showing towns lit up by electric light.

And most recently, *What's weird on earth* includes a whole range of stuff from natural phenomena such as singing rocks, red waterfalls, and raining fish, through to supernatural sightings of yetis, UFOs, and ghosts, and of course humankind's own oddities, including a toilet museum in India, a Malaysian church in the shape of a chicken, and a law banning breaking wind after 6pm in Florida, USA (presumably at 5.59pm is ok though).

Like all the books in the series, the map is the star of each page. Each map, which is individually commissioned, is themed to the content. So, for example, on Toxic treats (about poisonous foods), Earth becomes a picnic blanket set out with an array of exotic plates in the appropriate

locations. The map became a maze for the Maze spread; and a blueprint for Awesome architecture.

Maps are illustrated with artwork, photographs, or graphics that impart many levels of information (some all at once):

Instant information: telling the reader immediately what they are looking at (example: on Swarms in *What's weird*, insects almost literally fly off the page

Images: showing what things look like (animals, people, buildings, plants, paintings... the list is nearly endless)

Locators: showing where things are (every map!)

Scale: in some cases, such as The Black Death in *What happened when*, illustrations are scaled to show emphasis – so the bigger the rat, the more plague deaths in that area.

Equally, if the idea for the topic couldn't work on a map, then it was rejected from the book. This was an especially challenging concept for *What's weird*: it wasn't a case of simply being able to locate an object or event, it had to relate to the

place. There were all sorts of weird ideas that were discounted because they were too general and not location-specific (my favourite being funny animal antics, such as dogs who have stood for political office [mostly, but not entirely, in the US] – certainly weird, but nothing to do with the actual place, sadly).

It's not quite all about the map. Each book has added value in other ways: there are introductory reference pages in each chapter of *What happened where on earth*; timelines in *What happened when*; infographic fascinating facts in Atlas; and a fun facts chapter in *What's weird* (including illustrations of different hand gestures around the world). There are also some distorted maps in *What's weird*, resizing countries according to topic. Ok, those bits are definitely all about the map.

The high-end quality of DK books and our decision to make these maps 3D go hand-in-hand. As a company, we pride ourselves on the quality of our books: design is as key as the reliability of the information. Indeed, our company motto is "Better by Design".

We also want to stand out from our competitors in terms of offering new and exciting ways of engaging readers, such as using realistic graphics to portray images that you can't get as photographs. Equally, using photos is a way of proving that these weird things – such as pink lakes – really exist.

It takes a big team of people to get this stuff right! Editorially, these are not easy books to research: finding reliable, verifiable information from all over the world is no mean feat. It was a constant challenge to balance the overload of items that came from the USA or Europe (it's only now that I realise how small Europe is, after trying to cram too much onto the map every time) with the sparse offerings from Africa or north-east Asia.

Our team was:
Senior editors: Fleur Star, Chris Hawkes

Other editors, researchers and fact-checkers: Suhel Ahmed, Scarlett O'Hara, Vicky Richards, Jess Cawthra, Ann Baggaley, Anna Fischel, Anna Limerick, Georgina Palfry

Senior art editor: Rachael Grady

Designers: David Ball, Chrissy Barnard, Sheila Collins, Kit Lane, Sadie Thomas

Illustrators: Stuart Jackson-Carter, Jon

3D Illustrators: Adam Benton, Simon Mumford (also our cartographer)

Picture research: Sumita Khatwani, Rituraj Singh, Taiyaba Khatoon

As well as dealing with us editors begging to include three things where only one would fit, the designers had their own challenges. It took many stages to achieve the finished map: idea, low-res base map position to get the best viewpoint; styling ideas (whether the 'fun' would be part of the map, such as making it look all under water or made from gold, or whether it would be a plain map to show terrain); and then it was over to commissioning illustrators to bring those ideas to life – in particular to Simon, without whom this series would have been a very different beast.

In his words, talking about *What's weird on earth*:

From my perspective as the 'map guy', the book was a great mixture of technical and creative challenges. The base maps themselves begin as a coastline that is extruded in 3D modelling software to produce the trademark 'cliff'. The fun starts when we try to decide how best to present a subject in a way that will inspire, educate and entertain. Highlights for me were:

The Lightning strikes map started life as a very pixelated lores world map... I thought maybe we could use the 'hair' function in the software to create columns and after a bit of playing around we ended up with 468,028 individual columns (each representing a pixel on the original map) that made everything much more dynamic.

Modelling the tentacles on Mysterious monsters was great fun, channeling memories of

Captain Nemo and the Nautilus being attacked by giant squid...

Submerged cities took a VERY long time to render, all the reflections, refraction and transparency needed to create a convincing water effect adds up to a lot of maths for the software to do to resolve the physics of light bouncing around the scene.

Adding a bit of humour to Through the earth's core meant modelling a guy on the end of a VERY long ladder, they still make me smile when I see him happily waving from his tunnel despite the 8,000 mile drop below.

So there you have it: the blood, sweat, and tears behind a very successful international series that is all about showing things how they are – on maps.

I don't know of any confirmed titles for the series, but we are always thinking of new ideas.

Picture books

After the Fall

Dan Santat

Along Came A Different

Tom McLaughlin

The Art Garden

Penny Harrison, illus. Penelope Pratley

Dinosaurs Don't Draw

Elli Woolard, illus. Steven Lenton

Forever Or A Day

Sarah Jacoby

Gaspard the Fox

Zeb Soanes, illus. James Mayhew

Goat's Coat

Tom Percival, illus. Christine Pym

Grandmas From Mars

Michelle Robinson, illus. Fred Blunt

Hello Hello

Brendan Wenzel

How Many Trees?

Barroux

I Do Not Like Books Anymore

Daisy Hirst

Is It A Mermaid?

Candy Gourlay, illus. Francesca Chessa

Looking After William

Eve Coy

The New Baby

Lisa Stickley

Not Just a Book

Jeanne Willis, illus. Tony Ross

Not My Hats

Tracy Gunaratnam, illus. Alea Marley

The Story of Tantrum O'Furrily

Cressida Cowell, illus. Mark Nicholas

Thinker – My Puppy Poet and Me

Eloise Greenfield, illus. Ehsan Abdollahi

Tiger Lily

Gwen Millward

The Very Hungry Hedgehog

Rosie Wellesley

The Wardrobe Monster

Bryony Thomson

We Wear Pants

Katie Abey

What's At the Top?

Marc Martin

Junior books

A Good Day for Climbing Trees

Jaco Jacobs, trans. Kobus Geldenhuys, illus.
Jim Tierney

Alice Dent and the Incredible Germs

Gwen Lowe

The Art of White Roses

Viviana Prado-Núñez

Big Foot and Little Foot

Ellen Potter, illus. Felicita Sala

The Book Case (An Emily Lime Mystery)

Dave Shelton

The Chocolate Factory Ghost (The Dundoodle Mysteries)

David O'Connell, illus. Claire Powell

The Company of Eight

Harriet Whitehorn, illus. Maria Urducan

Dog Diaries

Steven Butler and James Patterson, illus.
Richard Watson

Elise and the Second-Hand Dog

Bjatne Reuter, illus. Kirsten Raagaard

Ella on the Outside

Cath Howe

Every Shiny Thing

Cordelia Jensen and Laurie Morrison

The Fox Girl and the White Gazelle

Victoria Williamson

The Girl With More Than One Heart

Laura Geringer Bass

Home Home

Lisa Allen-Agostini

The House With Chicken Legs

Sophie Anderson, illus. Melissa Castrillon and
Elisa Paganelli

Iguana Boy Saves the World With A Triple Cheese Pizza

James Bishop, illus. Rikin Parekh

The Infinite Lives of Maisie Day

Christopher Edge

Lady Mary

Lucy Worsley

Max Champion and the Great Race Car Robbery

Alexander McCall Smith, illus. Kate Hindley

Planet Stan

Elaine Wickson, illus. Chris Judge

Splash

Charli Howard

Storm-Wake

Lucy Christopher

To the Edge of the World

Julia Green

Twelve Nights

Andrew Zurcher

Young Adult books

The Astonishing Colour of After

Emily X R Pan

The Breadwinner: A Graphic Novel

Based on the original book by Deborah Ellis
and adapted from the feature film directed by
Nora Twomey

The Electrical Venus

Julia Mayhew

Big Bones

Laura Dockrill

Children of Blood and Bone

Tomi Adeyemi

The Exact Opposite of Okay

Laura Steven

The Eye of the North

Sinead O' Hart

Fragments of the Lost

Megan Miranda

I Have Lost My Way

Gayle Forman

Me Mam. Me Dad. Me.

Written by: Malcolm Duffy

Orphan Monster Spy

Matt Killeen

Outwalkers

Fiona Shaw

Piecing Me Together

Renée Watson

Renegades

Marissa Meyer

Storm-Wake

Lucy Christopher

WaR: Wizards and Robots

will.i.am and Brian David Johnson

The Wicked Deep

Shea Ernshaw

Non-Fiction books

Ada Lovelace: The Making of a Computer Scientist

Christopher Hollings, Ursula Martin & Adrian Rice

Ada Twist's Big Project Book for Stellar Scientists

Andrea Beaty, illus. David Roberts

An Atlas of Imaginary Places

Mia Cassany, illus. Ana de Lima

The Coral Kingdom

Laura Knowles, illus. Jennie Webber

Journeys: Tales of Travel and Trailblazers

Jonathan Litton, illus. Chris Chalik, Dave Shephard, Jon Davis, Leo Hartis

Migration: Incredible Animal Journeys

Mike Unwin, illus. Jenny Desmond

My Dad is My Uncle's Brother: Who's Who In My Family

Joe Lyward

My First Piano Book

Genevieve Helsby, illus. Jason Chapman

Now Make This. 24 DIY Projects by Designers for Kids

Curated by Thomas Barnthaler

Secrets of the Mountain

Libby Walden, illus. Richard Jones

Stories For Boys Who Dare to be Different

Ben Brooks, illus. Quinton Winter

Tallest Tower Smallest Star

Kate Baker, illus. Page Tsou

The Walkabout Orchestra. Postcards From Around the World

Chloé Perarnau