



Armadillo
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Board Books

A Seed In the Universe

Elyon Liu, pub. Post Wave

In this charming board book, which gives children the opportunity to begin to understand how vast the universe is, how small a seed is, but how utterly interconnected they are, there are some cleverly placed holes. As you turn the pages, watching the simple story unfold before your eyes, pay careful attention to the placement of the words, pictures, holes and of course, the seed. It has an exciting journey ahead of it and it is ready to show us that even the smallest seed has a big role to play and a place in the universe.

Hello, Potty!

illus. Ania Simeone, pub. Happy Yak

When your toddler is ready to say goodbye to their nappies and hello to their potty, it is an exciting moment. But don't get too complacent, there is lots of training to be done. There will be accidents, it can't be helped, but to help you along the way, to help your little one understand all about how to know when to use the potty, there is a vibrant new board book. Not only does it help children understand about this exciting new step but it has dials to turn so they can interact at each stage hopefully helping them to remember this new skill!

Little Seed

Hector Dexet, pub. Post Wave

Little Seed is a tall board book with a vibrant sunflower on its cover and a hole which goes all the way through the book! Open up to discover that not only does the hole show us some important stages in the life of one little seed: the first picture of the sunflower head has far more than we could count! There are also flaps to lift on every page, after all we have been told what happens next for the little seed but there is nothing better than seeing it too. A magical book of wonder to share and enjoy, a chance to watch the magic of nature unfold.

Mega Machines

pub. Priddy Books

There is nothing more fascinating to children (and on some occasions to this particular adult) than big machines! I am thinking of the mega machines that play a role in our everyday lives. From construction vehicles to boats, planes, trains and even farm machinery, there are so many to discover. Maybe you will have a favourite but it is so much fun to learn about them all. Start with learning what a machine is ~ something that makes our lives easier ~ and go on to learn that the biggest dumper truck can hold the equivalent of 90 elephant! Or that it now takes only 100 days, not 3 years, to sail around the world! A fascinating source of information and detail awaits.

My First Story Orchestra: Carnival of the Animals

My First Story Orchestra: Four Seasons In One Day

illus. Jessica Courtney-Tickle, pub., Frances Lincoln

You may well be familiar with the various iterations of the Story Orchestra from puzzles to sound books and more. Now they are available as board books allowing toddlers to experience classical music, perhaps for the very first time. These board books are interactive. *Carnival of the Animals* encourages little fingers to press buttons to hear a lion, swan and even an elephant. *Four Seasons* provides music from each season from the famous classical piece. A joy to discover, play with and learn from with their simple text and bold illustrations these will fascinate young children and hopefully the series will grow.

Our World: England

Sumana Seeboruth, illus. Ella Hobbis, pub. Barefoot Books

Our World: Türkiye

Emrah Güler, illus. Deniz Ücbasaran, pub. Barefoot Books

Our World: USA

Joëlle Retener, illus. Sarah Walsh, pub. Barefoot Books

There's a new way for our youngest readers to explore the world around them. The *Our World* series from Barefoot Books has three new additions. Spend a day in England with a traditional breakfast to start you off and even some cricket in the park. In Türkiye enjoy some delicious fruits, plenty of outdoor activities and learn some new words. There are 52 states in the USA, in this book we visit a handful of them giving us the opportunity to see how vastly different they are from one another. A fabulous way to explore some of the many cultures of our world.

Priddy Explorers: Predators

pub. Priddy Books

Are you ready to explore? Make sure you are wearing your brave hat for this one as we are about to explore predators! Young children, perhaps old enough to read alone, will love exploring the wild world of predators and discovering answers to some very important questions. Learn that birds of prey are known as Apex Predators and what that means. Discover how polar bears hunt in their frozen homelands. Did you know that some creepy crawlies are killers? Meet them here. The natural world and the wonders of its predators are brought to realistic life in this excellent board book of first introductions to nature.

Slide & Surprise!: Animals

Slide & Surprise!: Farm

pub. Priddy Books

These thick, chunky board books are absolutely perfect for little hands to hold. Parents your role will be in helping them to identify the animals filling the pages. *Animals* features the wild, the jungle, pets, under the sea and the forest. Discover and learn who lives in each place, then pull the sliders for some addition, exciting fun. *Farm* follows a similar structure only in this book there are farm animals, vehicles, baby animals, fruit and veg and finally things that are made on the farm. Educational and wonderfully engaging.

Upside Down Opposites

Danielle McLean, illus. Matt Hunt, pub. Little Tiger

Only with a book can you experience opposites in such a unique way as they are presented here. Board books are intended, primarily for toddlers, supporting their learning and development. This one does exactly that. Not only does it support reading and the learning of new words but it encourages interaction. Some of the pages can only be read if you turn the book upside down or looked at the opposite image. Happy Sad; Under Over; Good Bad ~ there are all manner of opposites to discover whilst moving the book around and enjoying the vibrant illustrations.

We Love Fruit!

Becky Davies, illus. Allie Busby, pub. Little Tiger Press

I wonder if you have a favourite fruit? I know that I do. Raspberries. And mango. Well, it's hard to choose only one. So, if you have a toddler, or know of one, who loves fruit they will love this board book. It doesn't ask its readers to choose a fruit instead it gives them permission to play with it. There are eight fruity characters waiting to greet you and you can press them out of the book. Then turn the

pages and see if you can match the fact with the correct fruit. Have fun with food, discover the joy of fruit and hopefully spark curiosity!

Your Farm

Your Forest

Your Island

Jon Klassen, pub. Walker Books

Is there a place that you like to visit, somewhere special for you, maybe somewhere you take a friend so you can show them all your favourite things. Jon Klassen invites our youngest readers to explore not one but three exciting places. There is a Farm, a Forest and an Island. Even better, they are all yours! Everything about each of these places is yours. From the sun to the cabin and even your very own plants. There are ideas about where to put everything and even what to do in each place. Every time you pick up one of these books remember, this is your place but will it look the same each time?

Picturebooks

Cloud Boy

Gregg Stobbs, pub. Oxford Children's Books

This is not a nature story, not a story about clouds, though it could be. No, this is a story about a young boy with distracting thoughts. Bobby is a neurodivergent child, and he finds that it can be challenging to contain his thoughts, there are after all so many things to see and do around him. When he gets distracted, he starts to float hence the idea of Bobby being a Cloud Boy, one who is perhaps seen as having his head in the clouds.

Now I know that I for one can relate to Bobby. I am constantly distracted by interesting things around me, by questions, including just the other day one about clouds. Seeing a completely cloudless sky made me wonder aloud where the clouds go to when we can't see them. My logically minded husband tried to explain it in scientific terms but that wasn't what had me, like Bobby, distracted, it was the ideas the thoughts generated. I share this example because I am fortunate enough to have people in my life who may not fully understand but allow me the freedom to have these wonderfully random thoughts.

Bobby's family don't understand, at first, and Bobby himself feels that he would like to be able to concentrate like his friends do. His family try all manner of different things to try and keep Bobby on the ground. The result is that Bobby feels empty. It takes time, patience and some trial and error but before long Bobby's family and friends realize that rather than trying to make him like them the best way to understand him is to think a little like he does.

An incredibly uplifting and positive story about neurodivergence, celebrating it as we all should try to do.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Don't Laugh at Giraffes

Dyan Sheldon, illus. Alex Willmore, pub. Magic Cat

One day a little boy visits his grandad and asks him how he can be happy, just like his grandad is. So, grandad sits him down and gives him sound advice such as "don't jeer at deer, hurl blossoms at possums and don't put socks on a fox" and certainly not to "tie balloons to baboons or mock the croc because they have feelings too." "Large or small, whether silent, loud or smart. The world's a vast and complex place and all things play their part."

The concept behind this story is deceptively simple, a young boy asking a grandfather who is clearly a role model, how he too can be happy. That in itself is an absolute charm. As we explore with the little boy and his grandfather we realise that what we need to do, how we can be happy, is through kindness. Being thoughtful, kind, caring, having a smile and in the case of this wonderful story, sharing laughter, are all the different keys that we can use to unlock happiness in ourselves and the world around us.

This is a delectable rhyming story about being kind to all creatures, of any size or shape, with amusing and really sweet illustrations by Alex Willmore. Lovely.

Carol Farley

Do Not Say These Words

Frances Tosdevin, illus. Rhian Wright pub. UCLan

Small children will love this picturebook. For one thing, it is full of ‘naughty’ words. Thankfully, it replaces those naughty words with alternatives that aren’t at all silly, like ‘Squirtle-plop’ and ‘Floppy peach-cheeks’. For another, it is packed with big, bright and very pink illustrations. I love Rhian Wright’s bold style; subsequent readings will allow you to pick up on all the funny little details, like the post-it notes dotted all over the lab.

The story follows a female professor who is determined to ban funny words because they make children giggle – the resulting giggle-gas is threatening to make the world wobble and fall of its axis. My favourite characters are the amphibian scientists who manage to sneak onto each page and struggle to contain their own giggles.

In a world where book bans are a hot, and frankly horrifying, topic perhaps there are some subtle messages here about the power of words, but all that is secondary to the ultimate aim of the story – to make listeners laugh. *Do Not Say These Words* is great for sharing if you can manage to keep a straight face and revolting in that way that children love; be warned though, it is bound to produce lots of silliness and giggle-gas!

Louise Clover

Felix Found An Egg

Charlie Miller, pub. Flying Eye Books

Felix loves being outside in his garden where he can do anything: laugh, play and imagine that he is on exciting adventures while lying on the grass. There is one area of the garden which Felix prefers to stay away from though – the compost bin! When he plucks up the courage to go to the compost bin to tell the horrible monster who lives there to find his own garden, he instead finds an egg.

Felix's imagination then runs wild as he creates multiple scenarios for what could be inside. Like any young child, Felix considers the benefits and drawbacks of the different possibilities and is taken on a rollercoaster from excitement to fear through each option that runs through his mind. The illustrations are brilliant and capture Felix's thoughts and emotions in a colourful and creative way so that the reader feels that they are on the journey with him.

This is a lovely story that opens the imagination and explores the possibilities that can come from a small discovery. What would you want to be inside a mysterious egg that you found in your garden?

Tom Joy

Hannah and the Violin

Satoshi Kitamura, pub. Scallywag Press

Hannah is alone in her garden wishing there was somebody to play with when she stops to look at a leaf. When she finds a twig she suddenly has a violin and its bow. She pretends that she is creating music, soon there is an audience of animals, insects, birds and plants who sing and dance to her music which now has an "orchestra of clouds" accompanying her. Hannah is a solitary figure, until her mummy appears to announce that dinner is ready at the end of the story. Eagerly Hannah asks whether Mummy and Grandpa heard her playing the violin in the garden, which of course they had not. The final spread depicts Hannah performing her music to the adults.

The world Hannah imagines whilst playing music is vivacious, colourful, jaunty with curved fences and swaying lampposts, towering flowers, countless swarms of butterflies, bees, ladybirds and more. The company she wishes for has arrived and everything around her is dancing to her music. Kitamura has created a joyful celebration of imagination. There is a spontaneous, energetic, dreamlike feel to this book, especially the page where Hannah is floating in a royal blue sky where form is exaggerated with elongated curvy keyboards and flutes interspersed with abstract shapes and patterns, music symbols and stars. This cacophony of shape and colour feels Kandinsky-esque.

The way Kitamura is able to evoke such a sense of enchantment, connecting music, imagination, and play to nature and harmony is inspired, making this a deceptively simple picturebook which grows with meaning on each reading. This is a magical and special book.

Natalie McChrystal Plimmer

I Am Strong Just Being Me

Laura Dockrill, illus. Kip Alizadeh, pub. Little Tiger

In this rhyming picture book, a child called Bean is trying to work out what ‘strong’ means.

Does it have a shouty voice? Is it always right? Is ‘strong’ something to try to be? She/he asks Nanna, “because Nanna’s – like- know-it-all” what strong is, and whether they can be strong when they’re so small. Nanna goes through two examples of what strong isn’t: playing the hero and saying you’re fine when you’re not: and then several about what it is: protesting against wrongs, saying sorry, and forgiving someone. It’s OK to get things wrong and try again, to ask for help; it’s strong to celebrate other people, to show love, and to have room to grow. Finally, Nanna asks if the child thinks she, Nanna, is strong, because “there’s a lot of me in you.”

This book by the award-winning Laura Dockrill, shows a lovely relationship between Nanna in her dungarees, mostly in the garden, and the inquisitive child. (There are pictures of flowers on the endpapers, with their names and meanings, which is a nice touch.) It’s beautifully illustrated by Kip Alizadeh, colourful and positive, and this will be a lovely addition to the bookshelf or library, notably for ‘feelings’, but a comforting book to share at any time.

Diana Barnes

I'm Gonna Eat a Monster

Kael Tudor, illus. Scott Wilson, pub. Puffin Books

In Kael Tudor’s latest picturebook adventure you are invited to join Little Rabbit and Grey Wolf. This cheeky pair are on a quest to EAT a monster!

One morning, deep in the forest, Grey Wolf spots a delicious-looking rabbit which makes him think that it must be time for breakfast, but Little Rabbit isn’t in the least bit scared. In fact, she has plans of her own for the day – plans to find and EAT a monster. But we all know monsters aren’t real ... don’t we?

This book is such a hoot, I honestly couldn’t stop laughing, there’s a little red riding hood vibe about the story which adds an additional layer of humour for the adult reader as we all know how her story ends for the wolf! There are places for children to join in with the story, places where they can stomp, snigger and roar. This is one of those books that deserves to be read out loud, so this is what I did. After our younger children got their silver reading reward I read this to them and discovered that as much as I giggled when reading it to myself it really is even better read aloud.

And when it comes to the end of the story the twist is brilliant, you'll just have to read it yourself to see what author and illustrator have done with this story! This is a debut for illustrator Scott Wilson and his illustrations bring the book to life. A must read for the child in your life.

Helen Byles

Mr Norton's New Hat

Huw Lewis Jones, illus. Corey Egbert, pub. Little Tiger

One Monday morning, Mr Norton finds that a mouse has made a house in his hat. Being a kind person, he doesn't want to disturb it, so he goes to work all the same. And so begins a jolly, silly story as day by day, a new animal is added to Mr Norton's menagerie. On Tuesday it's some birds in his bicycle basket, on Wednesday a squirrel in his shoe, on Thursday a selection of stoats in his satchel ... and so on in classic cumulative fashion. As the week progresses, the animals move into Mr Norton's house. There's a bear in the bath, a skunk in the sink and when Mr Norton goes to bed, he finds it's already rather full! Will Mr Norton remain calm and kind, or will he lose his cool as the animals gradually take over?

Young children will adore hearing this hilarious story read aloud. The full-page illustrations add to the charm, with Mr Norton's facial expressions being particularly entertaining.

The simple plot bounces along to reach a satisfying resolution that gives a message of kindness and tolerance.

A future classic which is ideal for sharing at home or a great addition to a school's book corner, classroom or library.

Janet Ling

Our Wee Place

Sophie Kirtley, illus. Ellan Rankin, pub. O'Brien Press

I have never been to any part of Ireland but after exploring some of its most magical places with Emily and Granda, as described by Sophie Kirtley and illustrated in wonderful watercolours by Ellan Rankin, I want to!

This book will be an invitation to this island and specifically Northern Ireland where this book is set. It is as much about the wonder of a place as the wonder and joy family bring. If you have extended

family, specifically grandparents, this story could be an inspiration for you too. The story reminds us that we should spend time with them and make sure to absorb the magic of the tales they can tell us. This is the story of one little girl, Emily, and the visits she makes to see her Granda every Saturday. It is all about their own special routine. It's charming, magical and heartwarming.

Under the apple tree at the end of the garden they sit, Emily pours tea and Granda shows her photos. These photos take them both on magical adventures, to different places with every visit, every photograph. They visit all of Granda's favourite places around their Northern Ireland home. Share in the magic of a homeland, in the fun grandparents bring to grandchildren and new friends.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

The Watering Can

Julien Baer, trans. Selene Bright, illus. Marie Dorléans, pub. NYRB Kids

Translated from French, this picture book is not country-specific, as the story happens in the land of a child's imagination, on a street and in a flat that could be anywhere.

It starts with "On the street, the possibilities are endless", as Nina, walking home from school, picks up a yellow watering can from a pile of junk outside a neighbour's house. Watering the house plant is one of her weekly jobs, and she fills the can with warm water and gives it a drink before popping into the kitchen for a snack. On her return, she is amazed to find that it has grown, with its leaves touching the ceiling. Realizing that this must be because of the watering can, she enlarges one of her socks until she can crawl into it, makes her cat enormous, and enlarges the flat. Her parents will be so happy! The family car has been too small for all the holiday luggage, so that gets watered, and grows to a crazy size. She fancies being bigger herself- but she's used all the water. She puts in some cold water, and sprinkles herself, but this time she shrinks! Nina is very good at thinking, and she works out that warm water makes things grow, but cold water makes them shrink. With some difficulty, as she is very small, she manages to put some warm water in the can, and jumps in, returning to normal size. She waters everything back to normal just in time before her mother comes home, then goes downstairs to return the watering can to the pile of junk, but she picks up a large paintbrush, which turns everything rainbow colours... We finish as we started: "On the street the possibilities are endless".

Nina is not concerned, but delighted, by the transformations described by Julien Baer, and the possibilities of a child's imagination are well illustrated in prize-winning Marie Dorléans' colourful artwork. This is fun to read and share, and could lead to more speculations about what might happen if...?

Diana Barnes

We are Definitely Human

X. Fang, pub. Pushkin Press

This is a wonderful book about kindness and helping others.

A perfectly normal Mr and Mrs Li, live in a perfectly normal town in a perfectly normal house. They are visited by some perfectly abnormal beings, who claim that they are ‘definitely human’, even though it is incredibly obvious to the reader that they are not. These ‘definitely human’ beings are depicted, on the front cover, in vibrant neon pink, against a black background. It is incredibly eye-catching and the first inkling that we are going to meet some very unusual characters, as we turn the pages of the book.

These mysterious creatures are ‘definitely human’, after all they make business, play sports and wear hat. All very human things to do, aren’t they? They enter Mr and Mrs Li’s life, explaining that their ‘car’ has broken down, not expecting that Mr Li and the community will all pull together to help fix it. And even though there is something very strange about these creatures, not one of the community mentions anything about them – they welcome them and help them as if they are one of their own. The topic is simple – show kindness to all and accept differences and the narrative is simple and engaging.

The illustrations are bold and colourful. The ‘definitely human’ beings are so bright against the muted colours of the earthly background, really exaggerating the contrast between the two sets of beings. It’s such a clever technique. I read this to my class, and they absolutely loved it – the illustrations, the language, the story, and its message. It was a big hit, and I am sure it will be loved by all who read it!

Claire Webb

Early Reader Books

A.F. Harrold's Pocket Book of Pocket Poems

A. F. Harrold, illus. Jack Viant, Bloomsbury Children's Books

Poetry in your pocket is what this book promises and delivers. Really, this book will fit in a pocket and very easily into a bag meaning you can take the joy of the poems A.F. Harrold is sharing, anywhere. That also means you can take giggles and outright belly laughs everywhere too though you might need to be careful of those, they can startle people!

Discover poetry as you have never seen it before. Every poem is short, some might say these are mini poems but they are each complete. Each shows how powerful poetry can be, how words can be used to the greatest effect and how much fun poems are. Find a penguin with a peanut allergy, a granny who (for reasons known only to her) has curtains on her glasses and learn why Dave really should stop naming things...!

Beastie Bros: The Cabbage Juice Crime

David O'Connell, pub. Scholastic

Have you ever had the pleasure of seeing a firefly? They are quite magical; they live up to their name by lighting up and usually come out at night. In Bugtown, a place teeming with minibeasts, lives Dash, a firefly. Whenever Dash is happy his bottom lights up. When he is hungry... Well, lets' just say you might not want to meet him when he is hungry!

Dash's adoptive brother, Dribble the snail likes food too, specifically cabbage. Dribble also likes to invent things so of course a robotic slug that makes cabbage juice is the perfect invention. But Roboslug is so good that it is stolen. Now the brothers, perhaps an unlikely pair but a great team, need to work together to foil a master criminal plot, defeat a crystal worm, and try to stay out of the dung heap... There may be custard too!

Bigfoot and the Wild Boys

Jenny Pearson, illus. Aleksei Bitskoff, pub. Barrington Stoke

Have you ever had the feeling that you want to be more than you are? That perhaps being normal, known as average and apparently easily forgettable, especially at school, has got tired and it is time to

do something about it? You would not be alone for that is exactly how Joe feels. Then he hears a rumour. He hears that a Bigfoot-like beast has been spotted in nearby woods.

An idea forms. Would catching Bigfoot mean an opportunity? Would it mean that Joe would finally be someone, stand out from the crowd, make him popular? In short would it make his dreams come true. There is only one way to find out. Joe and best friend Tiago set off on a quest. They have no real plan, no survival skills but they will get some unexpected results! A wonderfully funny and relatable story.

Blue Jelly and Strawberries

Attie Lime, illus. Kate Sheppard, pub. Otter-Barry Books

Do you like to try new flavours, get your tastebuds tingling? It's exciting and sometimes not everything will be wonderful or even nice but without dipping a toe in and trying how would we know? It is a little like that with poetry which is what makes Attie Lime's collection of playful poems so much fun, you can try them out, see if you like any, get a taste...

There are questions and suggestions, there are playful words, silly foodie suggestions. All in one small book of poems that are perfect for younger readers. Find out if a T-Rex likes to be tickled (without the danger) or if under the ocean there are mercats chasing mermice. Perhaps your parents will let you try pingpong with peas and if not then just eat that blue jelly and those strawberries... Yum!

Call the Puffins!: Tiny and the Cave Ghost

Cath Howe, illus. Ella Okstad, pub. Welbeck Children's Books

Have you visited the island of Egg recently? It is a fabulous place, full of puffins who love to and have fun. For Tiny and Muffin, when they have free time, they also enjoy hopping along the shoreline looking for anything interesting the sea may have washed up. And whenever Tiny is feeling lucky something unusual always finds them. Today is one of those days!

It is also the day that the Puffins need to put their rescue training into practice. A chick has gone missing and the trainees are all ready to help. But the chick could be in one of the island's caves, the dark and spooky ones, the ones that might be haunted – that is what the legend says. Can Tiny and Muffin gather their courage, find the chick and lead the team to safety? I certainly hope so, we need more Puffins! stories...

Cat and Dumpling: Home Sweet Home

Nicola Kent, pub. Oxford Children's Books

Cat and Dumpling are brand new characters in a brand new chapter book series, this is their first book, the first time we get to meet them, the first time they meet each other. It is going to be exciting and the story is going to set Cat and Dumpling up for some exciting adventures that I already know I want to make sure to follow.

Cat and Dumpling are as different, as opposite, as it is possible to be. Cat is impulsive, a dreamer and loves to knit. Dumpling is cautious, makes sure to plan and loves gardening. When they meet they are both searching for their perfect home but when they realise they have both fallen in love with the same place can they make sharing work or will their differences prove to be too much? The perfect stepping-stone book with a great story.

Croaky: Caverns of the Gemosaurus

Matty Long, pub. Oxford Children's Books

Ready for a froggy adventure? Croaky is ready to take you on one! Croaky is a Woggle Scout and he wants to show you just how much fun that can be. Real life adventure? Check. Selling cookies? Nope. These Woggle Scouts are the perfect group for Croaky and this, their third adventure is every bit as exciting as you might imagine. Put your hard hat on, grab your torch and follow them underground...

Underground is where, apparently, the Gemosaurus lives. The Gemosaurus is a mythical creature but when did that ever get in the way of adventures? And a visit to the Crystal Caverns is certain to be fun either way. What none of them expect are the runaway mine carts, the deadly lava flows or the carnivorous plants... Is it worth dodging all this danger to find the Gemosaurus? Of course it is!

The Fantastic Intergalactic Hamster!

Rachel Morrisoe, illus. Jenny Taylor, pub. Puffin Books

I have never had a hamster as a pet though I know what they look like and I had always imagined that would be all I needed to know. Luckily for me, and you, there are some children who know a lot more about hamsters than I do and are able to spot aliens, specifically the ones who have just crash-landed and look remarkably like cute hamsters.

They have landed outside Rebecca Refractor's school and she knows just who to call. Jack and his sidekick, Superpet, Hercules the Hamster. They are going to have to work hard and fast, these aliens want to turn earthlings into cracker-hunting zombies. Why do they want crackers and who is the Big Cheese leading this invasion? You'll have to read this story to discover if Jack, Hercules and the Superpet crew can stop these cute aliens before it all goes to crackers...

Guardians of the New Moon. Ming and Miaow's Great Race

Guardians of the New Moon. The Year of the Rat

Eric Huang, illus. Phúng Nguyễn Quang, pub. Little Tiger

Miaow is a temple guardian, spending his days chasing mice until the Jade Emperor invited every creature on earth to compete in the Great Race. Miaow has to enter but not only is he reluctant he has to socialize. Ming is a shapeshifter and the complete opposite of Miaow yet she is determined they will become best friends, what she hadn't counted on was Miaow making other friends. They will have to work together to make it to the finish line...

After the Great Race Miaow and Ming have become Guardians of the New Moon and they already looking for more adventure. Luckily they have a mission. Race winner, the rat Su, needs to be taken home and needs help preparing for the first ever Year of the Rat. But Su tricked Miaow during the race and the pair are now constantly arguing, if they want the New Year to start well they need to learn to get along...

Marty Moose: First Class Mischief

Claire Powell, pub. Walker Books

Starting off a brand new series is a story that is full of hijinks and heart, bravery, self-confidence, friendship, silliness and of course fun! This is the first story featuring Marty Moose, resident of Little Ditch. We meet him on his first day on the job as Postmaster. Buttons have been polished, whiskers combed, Marty is ready to go.

Marty looks like a mouse but there was an accident with his birth certificate, hence his name. But he has bigger things to worry about today. Whisker Warren and its twisty turny tunnels; avoiding being a snack for two angry toads who need a parcel; work out who the mailbag mischief is at the post office and make it home in time for jam sandwiches! It is going to be a busy first day for Marty, I hope you're looking forward to finding out if he can get through it.

Tuck and Tina and the Lost Fortune

Jess Brallier, illus. Jack Keely, pub. Puffin

Are you ready to meet Tuck and Tina? I will give you some advance warning, they are the most unlikely of friends but they are both ready for adventure! Tina lives in a hole in the wall of room 123 at Boone School. No-one knows she is there but when she heard the teacher say a journal could be like a friend she decided to start one. She wants a friend.

It was very exciting for Tina when the school began on Monday, by Wednesday it is even better, the class in Room 123 have a class pet. A mouse. Named Tuck. Tuck never pays attention in class but he does love adventure, does that spell trouble for the pair? Possibly but first, they have to help find the rumoured hidden treasure so they can save the school! An absolutely brilliant caper and I for one hope there will be more.

Junior Books

A Sequence of Cosmic Accidents

S. A. Reyhani, pub. Rock the Boat

This book is tremendous fun! The first in a fabulous new middle grade trilogy full of action, magical happenings, twists and turns that make it one to watch out for in 2025. Influenced by the author's dual Persian and Scottish heritage, this story transports us to a brilliantly imagined parallel world filled with incredible characters.

We meet our hero Arian as he and his dad Dave are arguing about whether he should get a haircut, and we quickly learn how life has changed for the two since the loss of Arian's mother. When Dave's mobile rings they learn that the Head of Fostering from the local council is placing a child with them as an emergency measure and will be arriving in just a few minutes. 12-year-old Madlock enters speaking to them both in a curious version of English with which they are both unfamiliar. As they try to make conversation with her, Madlock insists that she needs to visit the Chemist on Bardsey Island. When Dave leaves the room to answer the door she tells Arian she is from another world - one filled with magick.

As Arian tries his best to reassure Madlock that the town has a Chemist and a branch of Boots, she tells him only one Chemist knows the location of the Primordial Light, that unless he agrees to help she will have to destroy him as he knows too much. Madlock tells Arian that she is the universe's most wanted fugitive and creates a portal to a Wormhole Highway. Soon they are on a mission, not just to visit the Chemist, but also to prove that Madlock is innocent. Together they embark on an incredible magical adventure, but can they put things right and prevent catastrophe?

Observant readers won't fail to notice that one of the characters on the front cover has a limb difference. This is fact Arian. Having worked with the charity REACH (<https://www.reach.org.uk/>) to ensure the representation of this is as accurate as possible, Reyhani creates a wonderfully inclusive world with references to how Arian's difference impacts on his day-to-day life, this will delight those who see themselves reflected here and will go a long way towards educating their able-bodied peers.

This book had me laughing out loud so many times yet welling up with sadness at the next turn of a page. This book will leave the reader in possession of information that will have them begging for more! I for one cannot wait for the next book in the trilogy!

Tracey Corner

The Appletree Animal Agency

Katya Balen, illus. Gill Smith, pub. Walker Books

When children reach the age where they no longer want to read picture books, but some of the middle grade choices are a little too long for them, short chapter books are the way forward. This book is perfect for these children.

Meet Mattie. Mattie often has some great ideas and plans but they do seem to have a habit of going a bit awry! Her friend Zoe might be used to Mattie's madcap schemes but it all goes wrong when they become apprentices to the new vet, Dr Polly. Discovering a puppy with a poorly leg, Mattie rescues her, naming her Luna. She decides (very sensibly) to take the puppy to Dr Polly's rescue centre. The problem is there are so many animals at the centre who need to find their forever homes that Dr Polly has run out of room.

Mattie, Zoe and Dr Polly's son, Casper decide it is up to them to help the animals find new homes, but is this just another one of Mattie's schemes and what will happen to Luna if they go ahead with their idea? This is a warm hearted adventure for all animal lovers.

Who couldn't help but love Mattie? ~A child full of love, kindness and a sense of doing the right thing. You can't help but root for her. She is the sort of character that you don't often find in stories. Along with her friends Zoe and Casper they make a fabulous team, and readers will find themselves looking up to them. This is the start of what promises to be a fabulous heartwarming series, and the adventures promise to be awesome. Plus Gill Smith's illustrations are guaranteed to make you smile!

Helen Byles

Clem Fatale Has Been Betrayed

Eve Wersocki-Morris, illus. Honie Beam, pub. Little Tiger

Twelve year-old Clem Fatale, fast-thinking daughter of notorious thief Jimmy Fatale and member of his devious Spider Gang, has squeezed through a window in Lord Weatherdale's mansion and let the other gang members in. They are there to steal the immensely valuable Fool's Canary, a huge yellow diamond cut in the shape of a bird. Their every move has been meticulously planned. But suddenly things go wrong. There are lights, the police. The diamond has been stolen, but not by them. Jimmy has disappeared. And the gang has accidentally kidnapped Lord Weatherdale's son Gilbert, though only Clem realises who he is.

They have to get away, but Clem is desperate to find her father. Reluctantly she enters the getaway car. She is appalled when the gang insists that instead of going to their safe house they make their way to her mother's home. Lynne Fatale cares far more about her cocktail parties than her daughter and is

certainly not pleased to see the new arrivals. It's not long before Clem is confined to her room. Not long either before she has set off on a hazardous mission to trace her dad and recover the diamond. At first Gilbert seems an embarrassing encumbrance but Clem soon discovers he is quick-witted with unexpected talents. He himself explains to one of the few people they can trust 'I'm not kidnapped anymore. I've been promoted! I'm more of a runaway sidekick.' As they race through the post second world war London underworld, navigating bombsites and sleazy night clubs they encounter not only danger but treachery.

This is a highly enjoyable, well-illustrated middle grade adventure, full of action and bursting with humour, the first of what will surely become an extremely popular series. The deep sea themed cocktail party with everyone dressed as sea creatures – perfect disguises for crooks – is a wonderful touch. The period details are delightful. Clem and Gilbert are great protagonists, and there are numerous other memorable characters, not least all the gang members. There is an impressive cast of villains, and several true heroes, including Winnie, the unflappable, clever taxi driver from Jamaica who sadly has time available to help Clem and Gilbert because so few people want 'a lady driver such as myself'. Racism, social inequality and social injustice are subtle underlying themes. Oh, and it turns out that Jimmy Fatale is a gangster with a heart of gold.

Anne Harding

The Doomsday Club

Kevin Moran, pub. The O'Brien Press

'I only lit a small fire.' ... When Jack, Conan, Yash and Jerry all find themselves in detention after Jack's unruly behaviour there is no knowing the adventure that awaits for them or for us! Prepare yourselves.

Until this point, until the detention they had rarely talked to each other (not counting that Jack and Conan used to hang out when they were younger of course - something that Jack certainly wants to forget.) However, whilst in detention, they witness a monster mysteriously appearing through a stone archway just outside their school. Jack, of course, wants to find out more and the others tag along – because why not, it could be interesting and they all saw it. When they go out later that night to investigate further, they discover more questions to be answered and find themselves on a quest to save the world. 'The Doomsday Club' is formed and our fate is in their hands.

This is an action packed story with hints at Irish folklore cleverly woven in. The boys have to work together to fight demons, to save themselves and, in the process they form friendships which at the start of the story seemed unlikely.

I thought that the story was gripping and I liked the detailed descriptions which managed to avoid gore, making it suitable for a wider audience. There are some places where Irish language used and I found frustrating initially as I could not read it - the letter combinations I am unfamiliar with - however it is appropriate given the setting of the story. Furthermore, the different school systems/year groups with ages (Irish to UK) may lead to some confusion for the reader too. Although it was a demon based thriller, I may have rolled my eyes a little when the teacher got involved at the end of the battle taking it all in her stride.

A fun story, an enjoyable read and a good cast of characters.

Hayley Reeve

Ella Jones vs the Sun Stealer

Lucy Edwards with Katy Birchall, illus. Caroline Garcia, pub. Scholastic

There were a few things that stuck me immediately about this book. The stunning and tactile cover, a true burst of sunshine and fitting the title perfectly. The intriguing title, who is Ella Jones and of course, who is the Sun Stealer ~ a person, an organization... I love books which intrigue me before I have even opened them. Then there is the author, Lucy Edwards. If you don't know she is a blind broadcaster, content creator and disability activist. Since losing her sight at the age of 17 she has been committed to sharing her own experiences and raising awareness. She has co-written this book with Katy Birchall.

In keeping with her mission Lucy has created a story which celebrates diversity, disability and above all the resilience of young people. It is the first in what is promised to be a series and after having read it I can't wait to discover more!

At 12 years old Ella Jones has been blind for two years. Luckily she has her guide dog Maisie, sister Poppy and best friend Finn by her side to support and guide her. But it is on a day trip to London with her family that the world changes. The sun is stolen, the light of the world is suddenly extinguished. Of course, being launched into the pitch black from the light of day causes panic and chaos. What has happened being the biggest question that everyone needs an answer to. Ella however is used to living her life in the dark, it is going to be her taking on the role as hero which could save the world. But her foe is a pagan god of light so the challenge is not going to be an easy one...

Beautifully written, clearly done so by someone who knows exactly what they are describing, from experience, when there are scenes in which the characters are navigating unknown spaces. The story is a brilliant adventure with a gentle message and a clear determination to show every reader that they too can be a hero. Let nothing get in your way from reading *Ella Jones vs the Sun Stealer*.

May Jonas

The Green Kingdom

Cornelia Funke, Tammi Hartung, pub. Dorling Kindersley

When twelve-year-old Caspia finds out she's spending the summer in Brooklyn – hundreds of miles away from her friends and the familiarity of her home in Maine – she is less than thrilled. Her father's new job takes her and her mother away to New York for three months where the small apartment they rent swelters in the summer sun. With her mother writing a cookbook and her father busy at a construction site, Caspia is left to her own devices in a city that feels lonely and intimidating. But when she finds a bundle of old letters someone left behind in an old cabinet, Caspia discovers "the green kingdom" through a collection of riddles sent between sisters decades before she was born. And in her search for the answers, finds a community that welcomes her and shares in her love of plants.

At once modern and old-fashioned, this place, *The Green Kingdom* draws a young girl out of her introverted shell and into the vibrant village life of a new town. Through the charming letters written between two sisters separated for months, Caspia is drawn to a plant shop, herbalist and botanical garden meeting a cast of diverse characters that share her fascination with the riddles. Readers are invited along with the ability to read the letters just as Caspia did, then try to solve the riddles before following her through an adventure that leads to the answers, often including little-known myths or fascinating historical context around the plant. It was lovely to see Caspia's appreciation of the natural world grow in what might seem an unexpected place.

As Caspia's experiences change, so do her friendships. From the complexities of conflicts between best friends back at home to new connections blossoming in surprising ways, Caspia learns to branch out and even set down roots in a new place. With the support of her parents, her entire family considers a summer away from familiarity a wonderful experience. *The Green Kingdom* is a testament to being open to new adventures and branching out – a great book for a child who is moving or anyone with a love of plants.

Stephanie Ward

Grumpfort

Jamie Hammond, pub. Usborne

This is an exciting, action packed and hilarious adventure story which takes place in the Forbidden Forest. It features the worst monster hunter in the world. Mo has the job of protecting the village of Bogfoss from the monsters in the woods. He sets off into the Forbidden Forest to catch a monster and

make himself a hero. He comes across Grumpfort, which is a secret monster fortress. There is a big problem. Mo has to stop the scary Grumpsnatcher from kidnapping another monster.

The story is full of fantastic characters. There is a grumpy gnome, a feisty troll and a kind-hearted snotwoggle. This combination of weird creatures and some very funny events leads to chaos throughout the book. To add to the fun, Mo finds himself in a booby-trapped sausage roll which is actually the fortress called Grumpfort.

The book is bursting with some brilliant black and white illustrations from beginning to end. It starts with a very useful and detailed map of Bogfoss. There follows a newspaper article about the death of Monday the Fifteenth, the warden and monster slayer. The story then moves on to Monday the Sixteenth, who is Mo. He actually does not want to be the warden. The villagers have no confidence in Mo and nor do the other wardens.

So, we have a book full of great characters, a brave lad who really doubts himself, plus loads of monsters. All this, along with the masses of illustrations and comic strips, leads to a great and fun read for young children to enjoy alone or with an adult.

Gary Kenworthy

The Last Dragon on Mars

Scott Reintgen, pub. Rock the Boat

There is a dragon for every sun, planet and moon, a physical manifestation of each celestial body. In fact, without Gaia, Earth's dragon, and her self-sacrifice that made Earth habitable, there would be no human race. By killing Ares, the Martian dragon, humanity thought they could do the same on Mars. They were mistaken.

Meet Lunar Jones, Mars-born, an orphan, waiting for an adoption that will never happen. He helps the younger children as much as he can, going out scavenging the harsh Martian landscape to find scrap metal, remnants of the military hardware left over from the war with Ares. On his computer coded bike, riding along the edge of storms, Lunar trawls the hostile landscape of a hateful planet in which anything not human only wants to kill him. The other scavenger crews probably also want to kill him, but there are at least rules. Unless no-one is going to find out that the rules have been broken. Lunar's only option is to keep moving, sending him blindly stumbling into Dread, a dragon.

The book weaves these two great stories together. Firstly, a brilliant cosmological tale about the universe and dragons, whose existence and ability to fold space-time makes human expansion possible. Some dragons love humans, some hate them, many are indifferent. More no doubt will be revealed about this grander narrative as the book series progresses. Secondly, the gritty adventures of

Lunar Jones, desperately fighting to survive and chosen by Dread to captain his human crew. Lunar must make friends of enemies and those that betray him if his crew has any chance of success. At stake is the future of Mars.

Throughout the story Lunar and his friends face many personal battles, making difficult decisions in impossible situations with no obvious right answers. As such, these flawed characters are easy to relate to, winning over the reader's empathy. There is also the ultimate fight between the dragons and their crews. Whilst Lunar and Dread are the classic underdogs - knowing too little, under prepared and outnumbered - as readers, we want them to win, despite the odds.

The Last Dragon on Mars is a story of deep betrayal and immense courage, but will it be enough to save Mars.

Simon Barrett

Please Don't Read the Footnotes Please

Rob Walton, illus. Reena Makwana, The Emma Press

Rob Walton's latest collection of thirty short stories seem to share one thing in common: they are all in this book. He reworks classic fairy tales of Goldilocks, the Princess and the Pea and of course wicked witches in deep woods. He plays with words creating the story of Penny Chocolate who buys pains-au-chocolate with chocolate coins. Other stories spiral away from the phrase you can lead a horse to water and suggest an offering of wafers. There are plenty of stories about teachers and teachers telling stories. Thrice Butterwicks knights. Tales of falling stars and the names of the planets. Stories that are counter-intuitive - being told to mess up rather than tidy your room. A puzzle asking you what they would put in a time capsule. Sadly, no story about a dog with a tuna bake, despite looking for it.

The stories are so varied that there is something for every reader to enjoy. They are short, quickly finished offering a chance to choose another one. Moreover, the stories are really accessible, encouraging reluctant readers to dip in and simply read.

Of course, as advised by the book's title don't read the footnotes as Rob Walton interjects his own stories with comical additions, observations and a couple of more serious thoughts. And in the example of one story, regardless of whether you read front to back or back to front there is a disclaimer of no footnotes at all. Apparently, an editorial error.

A second collection of stories are yet to be written. At the end, of the book Emma explains that readers can write their own stories inspired by Rob Walton's. It is only then I appreciated Rob Walton's brilliance in the variety of different stories in this collection from stories of different genres, stories

inspired by everyday items, leaps of imagination tangential to reality and what happened next told in the first or third person. Finally, to return to the title, Emma also suggests readers can add footnotes to their own copy of Rob Walton's book.

Please Don't Read the Footnotes Please cannot be summed up in one sentence, so I'm not going to try.

Simon Barrett

Rebel Heart

Ally Sherrick, pub. Chicken House Books

This is an incredible book with a truly dastardly villain. Merriweather Pryce is the main character, and she is living in a period of history that I know little about. It is 1645 and her town is under siege again. The battle between the Roundheads and the Royalists is a dangerous and she is worried about what her stepmother will do while her father is away fighting. Anyone interested in discovering more about this period of history could use this opening as an opportunity for just that.

This book does not shy away from the horrors of war and the reader will find themselves transported to the English Civil War by the descriptions throughout the book- an informative and impressive assault on the senses.

Merriweather will find her mission to find her father interrupted by capture and she will then find that not only does she need to escape and discover the fate of her father but also make it home to save all she has ever known. The courage and loyalty of Merriweather makes her an admirable and relatable heroine and I think readers will truly lose themselves in this gripping historical adventure.

Erin Hamilton

Vanya and the Wild Hunt

Sangu Mandanna, illus. Kristina Kister, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

With its striking cover this book is incredibly enticing. The hues of pink, purple and yellow hint at majesty and magic, the flying horse or is it a Pegasus or some other mythical creature speaks of ancient stories and the domed golden roofs of a building in the background suggest an exotic setting. Reader, you will not be disappointed.

Vanya's story is what we sometimes call a story within a story. It is also a book within a book (almost). Her story is inspired by ancient myth, legend and folklore. It could be retelling of any number of

stories but it is thoroughly modern too, exploring the traditional themes of exciting adventure with a heroine who has ADHD. It is not simply mentioned that she has ADHD, this is woven into the story for it is what makes Vanya who she is. And that is an eleven year old girl who loves to know the answers to questions, who is always busy looking for them and who, most importantly, can talk to books. It doesn't stop there though for the books talk back...

This becomes more important by the page with the story developing at a fast pace. Vanya's parents are captured by monsters (if you hadn't already realised this is a fantasy). But she thought these monsters were only in legend. It seems her parents have been keeping secrets and it is only once she is at the enchanted school of Auramere that she can hope to learn the truth. Here she finds herself among archwitches and archivists, here she finds magic and danger, here she finds out about the wild hunt. Can Vanya step up and save her new home, the one place she feels she belongs before it is too late?

A magical read full of twists and turns, surprises and wonder. An exciting new story and new world to explore.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Wildlands

Brogan Murphy, pub. Puffin Books

Wildlands is an emotionally, gripping read which had me in tears! Set 25 years in the future we find that humans have dedicated a vast area of England to nature to allow it to flourish, and have reintroduced species such as wolves, lynx and bison. This area, now known as the Wildlands, cannot be entered by humans. The only way to cross the Wildlands is via the high-speed train which travels through from London to Glasgow. When 13-year-old Astrid and little sister Indie are travelling to Glasgow to their meet their Mum, the train unexpectedly stops and, quite by accident, Astrid and Indie find themselves left alone within the depths of the Wildlands. Stranded with only a rucksack and a phone without signal, the two girls must work together if they are to survive and what follows is a journey that is as terrifying as it is exciting and wonderful!

In this story Murphy brilliantly paints a hopeful picture of a future for our world where rewilding and clean technologies are the norm and, although it is set in the future, it is easy to find yourself thinking that this is what we should be doing now! It is most beautifully written, and Murphy cleverly creates an immersive setting with her exquisite descriptions of this unpredictable and incredible new world.

Underpinning the girls' adventure is a heartwarming story about family, coming of age and belonging. This incredible book is a real page turner and will leave you questioning the values and beliefs we hold about our world, how we treat it, our respect for it and our love and respect for one another. A truly incredible, though provoking story, absolutely perfect for class discussion about what the future of our

world could and perhaps should be. I cannot recommend this highly enough! How privileged I feel to have stepped into this incredible new world.

Tracey Corner

Young Adult Books

After Life

Gayle Forman, pub. Hot Key Books

When I picked this book up after finishing reading a novel with almost five hundred pages, I thought to myself that *After Life*, with half as many pages would be a quick and simple read. How wrong I was!

After Life meant exactly that... Despite the book's short chapters there is an intricate and thought-provoking arrangement of time and people. American author Gayle Forman is fascinated by situations in which the central character relives a variation of a previous life, or what a life could be. Her latest book, *After Life*, is a variant of an earlier story, *If I Stay*, both of which allow readers a 'what if' situation which can change outcomes for many people. *After Life* is just what it says. Amber was killed in an accident seven years ago but has returned home at the same age she was when she died - seventeen. Some people she knew seven years ago can see and speak to her, others can't. Why? And why has Amber returned anyway? All enticing mysteries which gradually become clearer.

Forman includes an After Word at the end of the novel. In it she explains that many religions and cultures continue to revere and celebrate those who have died, something that she stresses is a relationship between the living and the dead, but it remains a relationship nonetheless. As an example, she cites Judaism in which there is a saying 'May their memory be a blessing', which so well suits a novel of this depth. Amber's arrival into the family and friends (and enemies) affects those around her rather than herself. She has arrived almost as a catalyst. Those events from seven years ago, and during the seven years since she died have touched the lives for others, some for better, some for worse. Without her interruption to their lives seven years later, many concerns and wrongs would not have been righted. As readers make their way through the pages they find a deeply thoughtful story in which Amber plays a significant role in righting wrongs and revealing individuals' true wishes.

A powerful, unusual, astonishing YA novel.

Bridget Carrington

Bloodguard

Cecy Robson, pub. Hodderscape

A romance that is for the strong of heart, and stomach. A gladiator romance, a magical romance. A romance that defies the odds. I think those short sentences are some of the best ones to use as a short

summary of what to expect from *Bloodguard*. But there is more, so much more to this book, it is layered in stories, myths, magic and love.

Leith of Grey thought, like so many others, that he had nothing to lose. He signed up to be a gladiator, like so many others. His sole aim? Win money to send his family, to help pay for the medicines his younger sister needed to survive. But after the Queen fell into a coma and then died everything changed. Everything was taken from Leith, the gladiatorial games were no longer that, now they were a fight to the death. It could be just another day, just another fight in the arena that Leith is about to face but it isn't. This fight, the one that lures us just a little more into the story, is the one that will change his life. This day is also the one on which he meets Maeve, making a promise he cannot walk away from and is finally given back the one thing he thought he had lost forever – hope.

Maeve is a royal princess, she is heir to the throne, close to coming of age and assuming a crown. However, she needs a king and the man chosen for her will no longer be able to fulfil the role (telling you why would be a spoiler). Potential candidates suggested by her 'uncle' are not whom she wants. She has her sights set on Leith, after all she does not expect a loving marriage, she merely wants him to do something for her and in return she plans to help him become Bloodguard, earn his freedom and return to his family. Maeve plans well, she is also a talented healer and able to make sure Leith is ready for each new fight, but there are many things she has not taken into consideration, people and events that could lead to not only her downfall but Leith's and both their families.

I was hooked on this story from the first page. Being an ancient historian and having therefore studied the history of the gladiators and gladiatorial battles I was lured in. I am also a huge fan of fantasy and romance so everything about this book suggested I should read it. Read it I did for Cecy Robson writes with a true conviction, there is power behind her words. She has carefully crafted a world, its people, events, timelines. Everything about the story suggests magic and power, including the words on the page. Outstanding.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Capitana

Cassandra James, pub. Hot Key Books

Capitana is a seafaring Young Adult fantasy novel about Ximena Reale, who has trained at La Academia to become and earn a Cazador (pirate hunter) cloak. Her parents were executed as pirates when she was young, and their reputation is in danger of putting Ximena's future in jeopardy. As pirates, they were traitors to the Luzan Empire and their crimes destroyed the family name. As a strong female heroine, Ximena strives to restore her family's honour by hunting the legendary pirate Gasparilla, who has captured the Queen of the Empire. While she is accompanied by her friend Pia, an

archivist, her intriguing yet handsome male rival, Dante deLeon, also joins her. But there is only one Cazador cloak available and Dante threatens her chance of earning the prize.

Capitana, the first novel of a duology, presents an enthralling, fast-paced story, with fantastic world-building by author Cassandra James. The action is interspersed with Spanish words, which contextualise the story and showcase Ximena's background. Twists in the plot will leave the reader shocked, but as there is very little adult content nor explicit language, it is therefore suitable for a wide range of readers. Although some seasoned readers may find the direction and ending fairly predictable, it is otherwise a nearly perfect narrative. With a second novel on the horizon (which author Cassandra James is currently writing), now is a perfect time to read this story.

As a debut novel, James' *Capitana* is a great book to take on holiday this year, particularly anywhere near the coast - where the many shipwrecks may leave you wanting to know more about life at sea and the history of piracy.

Chris J Kenworthy

Cloud Nine

Sue H Cunningham, pub. Scholastic

Evangeline (Evvy) Buckle is 16 years old and is a trainee celestial guide from Cloud Nine - the very nicest cloud reserved for those who have done something particularly altruistic just before they died. This of course lets us know immediately that Evvy is not alive and whilst we may be curious about the reasons for her death that is not where this story wants to lead us, it is not one of revenge for a wrongful death. No, this is a sparkling love story!

Evvy is a lively character, always pushing the boundaries and bending the rules, which on Cloud Nine are many. And after over one hundred years even paradise can get boring! She loves mixing with friends she has made who live on Clouds Seven and Eight (which is definitely frowned upon) and has a big heart. A heart that beats more strongly when she meets Tom, the love of her life (death!) in the world of the Beforelifers (those still alive). Tom is not scheduled to depart life yet and somehow he can still see Evvy, does that mean there are possibilities, can Evvy find out why this is happening and how she can make it work?

I raced through this utterly charming rom-com, with its touch of mystery, desperate to find out what would happen to the people we meet along the way (both the living and the dead) as well as, of course, Evvy and Tom.

It's a delightful, heart-warming read, from beginning to end. Highly recommended.

Carol Farley

Cruel Is the Light

Sophie Clark, pub. Penguin Random House

A foot soldier harbouring secrets, and a notorious exorcist come together in the long-lasting conflict across Europe between humans and demons. Together they embark on a journey to reveal the mysteries of Vatican City.

Seventeen year old Selene Alleva is a captain in the Exorcist Second Class, trained at the prestigious Vatican Academy. She is well known for her powerful skills to destroy demons. Selene is also the niece of the commander of the military of the Vatican's Imperium Bellum, who sends her to Nice to investigate whether a high level demon is responsible for the destruction. After learning who is responsible for the tragedy, Selene is shocked to discover that he is one of the most influential demons in the world of his level.

Nineteen-year-old French foot soldier Jules Lacroix has been fighting demons in Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, for many years. But following an attack by a demon horde, Jules has a troubling encounter with their leader, he flees becoming a deserter.

Selene and Jules cross paths and initially they clash and infuriate each other, but as they circumnavigate the complexities of his past, their growing feelings for each other become undeniable. However Selene's curiosity takes hold, and she is driven to uncover the truth about him. As Selene delves deeper into Vatican City, she realizes that there are far more secrets to unveil than just those belonging to Jules. In the face of a forbidden romance, secrets, and the challenging decision between duty and desire, will love really win out?

The somewhat open ended finish of the story prepares the reader for this duology's next instalment. I thought this YA fantasy was a lot of fun and refreshing, with some paranormal elements. I cannot wait for book two!

Katy Ralph

Disney Wings of Starlight

Allison Saft, pub. Studio Press

If you look out at the world around you and see it both brighter and full of magic then Alison Saft's *Wings of Starlight* is a must-read. If you are doubtful, especially about magic, but are willing to be convinced, it is still a must-read. For believers it reinforces what we already know, for doubters it is

proof that there is more to the world than light and dark, happy and sad, dream and nightmare. It helps us see how we should look beyond the 'but that is how it has always been...' opening our hearts and minds to more.

Clarion is destined to be the next Queen of Pixie Hollow, her destiny sealed when a child wished upon her star. As the countdown of days to the Coronation gets shorter, it gets closer, she cannot help but continue to be intrigued and very un-queenly! She loves to explore the lands around her, yearns to know more about them and when they all hear the reports of monsters crossing from Winter into Spring Clarion wants to do something to help. Travelling to the borders of their lands, to the forests where Winter begins she meets Milori, a guardian of the winter woods. A tentative friendship becomes a bond as the two realise they could be the ones to save all their lands.

At the same time, they learn more about one another, unlocking centuries of history, myth and knowledge. It helps them in their quest but it might also give them answers to questions they aren't yet ready for. The answers could become as deadly as the monsters now haunting their lands. Is there a way around it or do they have to accept their fates? Alison Saft writes beautifully, bringing the fairy lands out of folklore and into reality, imbuing them with wonder and delight in this star-crossed lovers romance (quite literally!)

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Nightweaver

R.M. Gray, pub. Penguin Random House

Nightweaver is an enemies to lovers 'romantasy' set in a world of pirates, fallen angels and demons known as Underlings. Fans of Phillip Pullman will appreciate the world set up and some of the ontological references will feel familiar and therefore it is easy to identify with the concepts behind the story.

The book begins with Aster, a 17 year old pirate, who lives and sails with her large family. They survive completely at sea as the land is the domain of the Nightweaver - apparent mortal enemies and hunters of humans. After a tragic battle, Aster and her family are taken as hostages but given a chance at a new life on land at the estate of a wealthy and powerful Nightweaver. As the story unfolds Aster and her family realise that many stories they have been told of Nightweavers may not be true. There is more to the Nightweaver than legend has told, they may be less dangerous to humans but there are still secrets that shroud the Nightweavers in mystery.

Aster's growing feelings for her captor and her own developing power put her at the centre of a conflict that threatens to tear the realm apart as the forces of good and evil battle for control. Aster is a feisty and fearless heroine and her love of her family and struggles to adapt to a life on land make

her a relatable character. Her confusion over her feelings for Will, her Nightweaver lord is real and rapid and gives you a good indication that there is more manipulation going on that perhaps they (or we) realise. Will Aster be able to remain true to her family and her quest or will she succumb to the greater forces at play all around her? A fast paced and enjoyable read.

Marianne Digiovanni

The Notorious Virtues

Alwyn Hamilton, pub. Faber

Before we start there is something you should know. Open this book and be prepared to be addicted, to the story, to the characters, to the world building, to the feeling of constantly being on the edge of your seat. And then there is the ending, the cliffhanger for this is just book 1. If you have all this in mind when you start you will be halfway ready because nothing will prepare you for the way in which *The Notorious Virtues* will sweep you off your feet.

I was expecting a fantasy. In part I got that. There is magic, there are magical competitions, there is a ruling family, there are the rich and the poor, knight protectors. But there are also paparazzi, or at least the equivalent of, there are men with cameras eager for all the gossip. There are automobiles, of a sort. This story is more than fantasy, more than magical, more than decadent, this story is simply more. The world-building and characterization are outstanding so you can perhaps understand why the warning! It truly is addictive.

Nora is the sixteen year old daughter of the most powerful heiress in Walstead. Her family have, and control, all the money and magic in the country but Nora's mother has been found dead, probably murdered and suddenly the throne is up for grabs. Nora thought she would automatically follow in her mother's footsteps but now there are cousins to compete against for there can only be one heir. She may have to give up her carefree life.

Then there is Lotte. The illegitimate daughter of Nora's aunt, sent away to live in a convent, to be forgotten, until now, until there is a chance she could be the heir. Lotte believed herself to be an orphan and suddenly finds herself not only surrounded by family but by a family who mostly want her dead unfortunately. When Nora learns there is more to her mother's death and can only trust a reporter things become even more tangled. Then there is the revolution bubbling under the surface of everything. The cousins might have to find they need to stay alive, no matter what. An outstanding first book bringing us the Veritaz trials and a story so good it will envelop each and every reader in its own cloak of magic.

May Jonas

The Rose Bargain

Sasha Peyton Smith, pub. Electric Monkey

The Others can be found among hidden waters and deeply rooted trees - in the wild, grassy places where light falls on ancient branches and bracken. These are the Fae, and they do not shy away from tampering in the messy human world.

Queen Moryen has tampered more than most and secured herself the crown of England since 1471 - the kingdom is sealed to this immortal, immovable queen. Now, in the year 1848, Queen Moryen allows London's upper classes to keep their ritualistic traditions: their balls and social circles, governed by calling cards and invitations. But Ivy Benton knows the dangers of this society: she and her family are outcast from social favour. Ivy is vulnerable, open to the cruelty and isolation of living as a social spectacle.

Ivy's sister, Lydia, disappeared three months ago, wrenching Ivy open - only to return after a week with no explanation for her bedraggled, shut down state. This scandal is the reason for their ruin, making every day painful: with Lydia unable to be her former self, Ivy faces a troubling mix of anger and loss - her closest bond is gone, and her sister will not reveal the cause. All she knows is that her sister's bargain with Queen Moryen, went badly wrong...

Every citizen has the opportunity to make one bargain with the queen. For the girls of high society this must be done at the Pact Parade on the first of May. They have to hope to increase their chances on the marriage market with a tactful bargain. It is Ivy's turn: in her sister's dress, with white garden roses twined in her hair, she carries the heavy weight of having to impress - to salvage something for her family's reputation. As young children they spent their time in the wooded places where Fae might lurk: lingering in the dusk with the twirling bats and dark gloom, hoping hidden faerie doors may be found. Now such ideas are forbidden, deemed childish, and Ivy can share them only in her letters with Ethel, an elderly family friend - only she wonders what role the fae may have played in her sister's disaster...

Ivy quickly feels like an interesting character, caught between conflicting emotions and a huge sense of loss. As the social season looms she is desperate to find a new pathway and must encounter the public emergence of the Queen's two sons: one human, Prince Emmett, who intrigues and frustrates Ivy, and one famed fae son, Prince Bram - whose status holds unparalleled appeal. Together they represent a precarious, potentially perilous chance for change, as Ivy lunges towards a new fate for herself and her family...

The Rose Bargain delivers an alternative history, an enchanting fantasy and an unexpected romance, beguiling and thoroughly addictive. Part two can't come soon enough!

Jemima Breeds

Solo

Gráinne O'Brien, pub. Little Island

How good is your music knowledge? I am sure you know the word solo which in the context of musical performance means a performance in which a performer has no partner, they are playing alone or 'solo.' There are many more music-related words, many of which act, loosely, as headings for scene changes in this story-in-verse. If you are curious about the genre and why it isn't classified as poetry the simple answer is that a poem will capture a moment in time, a feeling or an emotion. A story in verse can offer a deeper connection for the reader, there can be a greater sense of drama, emotions and many changes in pace. All of this can be found in *Solo* along with a story which, at its heart, is about one young girl finding her own way in this complex world.

Daisy has two loves. First and foremost, came music, then came David. It was, for a short time, idyllic to an extent. Music and David gave Daisy something to ground herself with, gave her a break from home life where she most certainly felt solo. Having twin brothers who have their own intense relationship she finds herself leaning on her father for support. To a point it has worked but as we get deeper into the story we see that there have been fracture lines in Daisy's life, lines she has tried to patch but which are ultimately going to give.

Never very popular at school because she would rather focus on her passion for classical music, her final year has started with a breakup, a friend's betrayal, her father's illness, her own loneliness. Not even music seems to help her find a way to cope with any of this but a new friend could. Flora could be the key to Daisy finding herself once more. More importantly Flora could be the one to help Daisy see that music might not be everything, help her to discover the person she really is, the one she wants to grow into. Heartbreaking and healing, this story deals with some big issues but gently, carefully, always holding the reader's hand, letting them know there is always someone there for them.

A deep, thought-provoking, powerful read.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Songs for Ghosts

Clara Kumagai, pub. Zephyr

Can you answer these questions about Japan: What are rekishi and yūrei? Do you know *Madame Butterfly*? Yes, the latter is an opera which most readers probably haven't ever heard, nor seen where it is set and what happens. Clara Kumagai has brought together Japanese history and culture, teenage

fears and loves, and the intricate cobweb of mysteries of family history. All this in an astonishingly unusual and thoughtful 440 pages with some excellent Japanese illustrations.

Author Kumagai lives in Ireland and has a heritage that links her to both Canada, and Japan. Adam, the novel's Japanese-American teenager whose Japanese name is Kai-san, lives in America, but longs to know more about his family, especially his Japanese mother, who died when Adam was still a small child. His American father is reluctant to tell Adam about his mother's family. When Adam discovers a small book in the attic he realises that it is the diary of a teenage Japanese girl from more than a century ago. As he continues to read the diary he discovers that the Japanese tradition of ghosts is a very important part of Japanese life, in which the extended family depends on careful politeness which allows everlasting memories of now dead family and friends. These ghosts are revered and it is believed they have a living presence when dead, which must be considered part of the live family. Adam is determined to find out more about his Japanese family and as he reads more of the diary he begins to see ghosts and he also discovers that elements of the *Madame Butterfly* story seem to echo the core of the diary he has found.

Entwined with Adam's family story Kumagai very subtly adds the difficulties facing twenty-first century teenage boys who are gay, and whose feelings for gay friends adds concern to an already difficult family life. It is made more difficult as his family are not one he feels he can openly confide in, and then there is the pressure from Japanese culture. Adam's summer in Japan shows readers that the culture is very different, but fascinating and that traditions are revered. This is a wonderful, deep and thought-provoking novel, beautifully written by an outstanding author.

Bridget Carrington

Non-Fiction Books

Key Skills For Kids: Dyslexia

pub. Priddy Books

There are a number of key skills that it is important for children to learn whilst they are still young, possibly even still in primary school. Among these are reading and writing skills. Some people, adults as well as children, can struggle with these skills because they have dyslexia and it is not always easy to recognise easily. Luckily there is a lot of support for those with dyslexia, providing them with the tools they need to succeed.

Priddy Books have developed a series of books to support children aged 6 plus, their *Key Skills For Kids* and one of the latest titles is *Dyslexia*. This excellent book is intended for use at home and is a bumper workbook with bookmarks and a tear-out Alphabet Arc that can be wiped clean for multiple uses. The book is bursting with activities and it could be tempting to sit down and try as many as possible. The advice is to spend 10-15 minutes a day, work through the book methodically and keep it up, little and often so the learning has time to be digested.

Each section begins with tips for parents and is followed by exercises for children. Beginning with Alphabet work helping children to associate letters and sounds there are plenty of helpful tips and colourful activities which gradually a little more challenging. After this children can move to handwriting practice then on to phonics before learning to break down words and use pictures to help with memory. By the time they reach the end of the book children will be able to practice reading, comprehension and writing. An excellent resource.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Little Dinosaurs, Big Questions

Swapna Haddow, Dr Diplo illus. Yitnig Lee, pub. Magic Cat

Deciding whether to include this book in our Junior and Middle Grade fiction section or non-fiction did not present a simple solution, much as the stories contained in this book. There are no simple answers to some questions, and ultimately I think that is what guided me. And so here we are, in non-fiction with a book of ten short stories each of which helps to go some way to answering some of the very BIG questions we all, and especially children, have.

Have you ever been asked why bad things happen; if they are being unkind can I be too; why do they have so much and I have so little and even does the grass hurt when I eat it? The questions that go the

mind of a child should never be dismissed, they are growing and learning which means questions are natural. We all ask questions when we are flummoxed by something be it big or small. It is the big questions which it is harder to find answers for, certainly answers that children can understand and process. With the help of the friendly, and very clever Dr Diplo and some wonderful Jurassic characters both children and adults can find the answers or take steps to.

After each question, the story that helps explain the answer, find a page which takes small steps to guide readers to an understanding. For example, the question about grass and feelings is answered by explaining that we can all do things that will give back to and help nature. There is then a page filled with activity ideas. A nature stroll is suggested in relation to this question. It may sometimes feel overwhelming to attempt to answer philosophical questions but with the help of these stories and their gentle guidance, the practical exercise too, soon we could all be working up to being or at least thinking like a philosoposaurus!

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Marvellous Messages

Rose Ayling- Ellis, illus. Lena Addink, pub. DK Books

Marvellous Messages is an ideal book for children aged 7+ and its colourful pages, exciting illustrations and engaging layout, make this a superb book for a multitude of readers. While it is educational, it is also enjoyable and the characters of Rose, her cat and the pigeon tour guide add a relatable element to the book.

This is a fascinating glimpse through the history of communication and language from across time spans and around the world. It is thorough and all encompassing, leading the reader from types of ancient communication through to emoji's, taking into account all the milestones and changes the world has faced which have impacted the way we communicate.

Sign language, body language and text talk are just a sample of the forms of communication covered, outside of the more traditional written and spoken forms. The formatting on each page is easy to follow and understand, with the vast range of illustrations making it even more enjoyable. The narrative voice allows the reader to feel part of the adventure through time, discovering fascinating facts and details new to them.

Erin Hamilton

Mega: The Most Enormous Animals Ever

Jules Howard, illus. Gavin Scott, pub. Nosy Crow

Mega is absolutely magnificent! It is an engaging book which explores the most enormous animals ever – any child who loves animals, especially larger and potentially more dangerous ones, will adore this book.

Packed with interesting information, *Mega* compares the megafauna (animals that weigh more than 45kg) from various periods of history to those who roam the Earth now. Exploring dinosaurs such as Giganotosaurus and birds like emus, this book really has everything! Split into different sections based on the group that the animals belong to it starts with mammals, then moves through birds, reptiles and fish so that it covers a whole range of species to suit the individual interests of every child. Each section is split into three main parts, 'Biggest Extinct' which explores the animals through history; 'Biggest Today' which explores the species that are the largest living currently and 'Megafauna at work' which breaks down how each type of animal survives and is successful on the planet today.

This book is fascinating and the pages are brought to life by the incredible illustrations which show the habitat that each group of animals would be found in. The text is broken into paragraphed chunks and scattered around the pages with clear subheadings which makes it really straight-forward to navigate as a reader. Each type of animal group has a double-page to introduce the key facts about them before the reader can explore the individual species that are related to each other. If you are interested in dinosaurs then there are plenty of references to them throughout the book – it is incredible to see how many current species have evolved from their dino-ancestors yet still carry many of the same characteristics.

Mega truly is a wonderful book. It is very engaging as it is a book that is easy to dip in and out of when you want to explore and discover facts about your favourite enormous animals. It certainly lives up to its name – what a mega-interesting read!

Tom Joy

Moving to Mars

Eduard Altarriba, Guillem Anglada-Escudé, Sheddad Kaid-Salah Ferrón, and Miquel Sureda Anfres, pub. Button Books

A most unusual book that raises questions about the Red Planet – will we ever set foot on Mars? What will the journey be like? What will be there? How will we live?

What I particularly like about this book is that it contains information about science but is also inspirational and creative. It's written by experts in planning future planetary bases. We learn about the solar system and Mars, but the book covers much more. Look at the chapter headings – Myths; Mars and Earth Sister Planets; Phobos and Deimos; Solar Wind and on they go covering every

possible detail that would need to be considered if we were to ever live on Mars! The pages are well presented with a good balance of text and illustration. Much information is conveyed visually which makes it very accessible. The artwork is clear and the explanations are easy to follow.

In addition to giving information, the book also encourages thoughts and responses. In the section on atmosphere we are told that in 2004 the Mars Express probe detected methane gas in Mars's atmosphere. This came as a surprise. On Earth methane is mainly produced by living things, although it can be produced by certain geological processes. The writer concludes: "We will have to continue investigating and collecting information to solve the mystery." In the section on society we are told living on Mars will be challenging with many difficulties. The author continues: "But it is also a unique opportunity to start over and try to learn from the mistakes made on Earth. A Martian society based on community and respect for the environment would be a mirror in which the inhabitants of Earth could look at themselves to find solutions to many of their problems."

Perfect for scientists, explorers and dreamers this is an awe-inspiring book that encourages readers to think about what humankind will be able to achieve. Don't miss it!

Brenda Marshall

Normal Women: Making History for 900 Years

Philippa Gregory, illus. Alexis Snell, pub. Red Shed

This book is an absolute mine of captivating information. Author Philippa Gregory is known for her well-researched historical novels and has trawled through history books gathering up all the tiny mentions she could find of women, discovering millions of them doing things we don't think are typical of women such as owning lands prior to 1066, being spies and soldiers during the Civil War and setting sports records at the end of the 19th century.

Prior to 1066, one in seven landowners was a woman but William of Normandy took control, giving land to his fifteen commanders - all of whom were men - and, in one fell swoop, women no longer owned any land in England! However, it is obvious that through the centuries women have been pushed out and controlled, omitted from the history books and from many walks of life, often only able to participate by disguising themselves as men. The book, aimed at 12-16 year olds, is a shorter version of the original book for adults (of the same name and with longer chapters and suggestions for further reading) and anyone interested in the history of women and feminism would find it fascinating.

Covering the period 1066 – 1994 and written in chronological order, great use is made of sub-headings to break up the text making it eminently readable and accessible and I love the notes in the margins adding further background information and comments. A great addition to the senior school

library plus many of the sections would be an excellent starting point for discussion around women's roles and their treatment in society. This is one of those books where you find yourself dipping into it and emerging a couple of hours later having been totally transfixed!

Barbara Band

Six Queens: An Illustrated Guide to the Iconic Queens of Henry VIII

Lydia Monks, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

There can't be many children who are not aware of the mnemonic 'divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived' and this wonderful book brings to life those stories of Henry VIII's six wives.

From his first marriage to Katherine of Aragon, a Spanish princess, after the death of her first husband, Henry's brother, Arthur to his last wife Katherine Parr, who became stepmother to Henry's three children and outlived him, we learn about all of his wives. Along the way we are given delightful glimpses into Tudor life including the great parties and food that was served, illnesses and medicines, and court fashions. Readers are introduced to the Reformation, key players and their roles in Henry's court, family connections and links and the various plots that were contrived, particularly when he was away fighting wars with France and Scotland.

The book is richly illustrated with some of the stories told in a monochrome graphic novel format making it engaging and accessible. So often books about Henry VIII give him centre stage with only brief mentions of his wives, this one explores their lives and we learn about their back stories, their education and interests, influence on the King and their fates. A fantastic introduction to this fascinating period of history for children aged 7 – 10 years.

Barbara Band

STEMville: The Fast Lane

Ben Newman, pub. Flying Eye Books

This is a fun book, crammed with amazing details and facts about racing cars. The book promises a lot from the very first page. There is an easy-to-read text accompanied by fantastic informative and very colourful illustrations. A table of contents makes it easy to find the different sections of the book.

A very informative book is made even better because of the great mix of fiction and fact. It is based on the well-known tale of the tortoise and the hare. The tortoise, Wilbur Harshell, is up against Frankie Thunderfoot, the hare. Will the tortoise or the hare win the race? Look out for an amazing twist at the

end of the story. The book has double page spreads covering the design, building and testing of race cars; the high-tech car parts and many gizmos and gadgets; speed and engine power; tyres, from dry to wet; braking; pit stops; driving skills; emergencies and skidding and crashing; the start line, starting lights and finish line. Even more is covered - street circuits, stock car racing, rallying, Indy 500 and drag racing!

If you want a basic introduction to everything there is to know about Formula 1 racing, then this is the book for you. Everyone will enjoy this, from the very youngest children, both boys and girls, as well as adults. Did you know that a regular car has 30,000 pieces, whilst a Formula 1 car has 80,000 parts? An illustrated timeline of racing cars from the 1950s to the 2000s is an excellent addition. A final touch worth a mention is that sportsmanship is very much a part of the story line.

Gary Kenworthy

What's the Actually Factually Difference?

Jane Wilsher, illus. Liz Kay, pub. Words & Pictures

There's a prevalent level of than most of the books of this type that I've seen recently? Yes. It's a good addition to an over-crowded shelf that should elbow most of its companions out of the way. Is there anything radically different or idiosyncratic about it? No. Simply, it's a top-notch example of its type and nicely accessible.

What do I most want to tell you? It pulls you in, it is excellent at getting you to start and then keep reading. Fact books, especially random-fact books which have no easy path to building engaging narratives are very easily boring. Not so here. The writing is wonderfully frictionless and erudite, it takes skill to be this unobtrusively good. The art has professionalism and a tonal/stylistic approach that represents a baseline for collections of random facts these days against which new entries to the category need to be compared. Is this one better hooky flicks of texture and an interesting palette. Again, below-the-radar clever. This probably is the single most important thing: this book is very readable. Second: there's lots of it. I hate feeling short-changed by fact books; this is value-for-money. It doesn't seem it at first glance, the pages are spacious, there's only 112 of them, but reading it feels like a marathon.

Lastly, it takes an approach that, having seen, I don't know why lots of other books aren't doing. It compares pairs of related concepts so that you learn about each through its differences to, or similarities with, the other. This is brilliant. It's such a good way of increasing the information content, getting higher-level thinking going, and following the framing of so many real-life questions actual children ask. There's some attempt at grouping the entries into thematic chapters, but they all pretty much fall within 'science', which is good, because clear explanations of science for 7-10s are not as commonplace as we'd like them to be.

Superb. If I had a library, I'd buy it and display it by the door.

Dmytro Bojaniwskyj

Xtraordinary People

Kate Griggs, illus. Steve Woods, pub. DK

The number of people who have some degree of dyslexia is very likely superseded by the number of misunderstandings that surround the condition. If only for that reason any new book which provides more insight, advice and practical tips is welcome. This particular book is more than welcome because it goes beyond the usual approach.

Xtraordinary People encourages us all, especially anyone with dyslexia, to unlock their very own xtraordinary. It is a guide, there is practical advice but there is also a great deal of encouraging messaging. Every page has a positive comment, suggestion or fact to share. What we see is that dyslexia is complex in that it can take many forms and affect every person differently, that means there is no one size fits all approach to dealing with it. Everyone will find their own way and this book aims to show just how many people have done just that, continue to do just that and how we all can too.

Did you know that those with dyslexia may struggle with spelling, reading and remembering but tend to be above average when it comes to creativity and communication. This ability, to be really, really good in certain areas is what Kate Griggs explains, makes those with dyslexia xtraordinary. Her aim is to show young people how to harness this rather than worry about challenges. With examples from seven different types of xtraordinary people, including storytellers, movers and entertainers a positive message is delivered and all those either living with dyslexia or who have dyslexic children in their lives need a copy of this book and its vibrantly positive messages.

May Jonas

Board books

A Seed In the Universe

Elyon Liu

Hello, Potty!

illus. Ania Simeone

Little Seed

Hector Dexet

Mega Machines

My First Story Orchestra: Carnival of the Animals

illus. Jessica Courtney-Tickle

My First Story Orchestra: Four Seasons In One Day

illus. Jessica Courtney-Tickle

Our World: England

Sumana Seeboruth, illus. Ella Hobbis

Our World: Türkiye

Emrah Güler, illus. Deniz Ücbasaran

Our World: USA

Joëlle Retener, illus. Sarah Walsh

Priddy Explorers: Predators

Slide & Surprise!: Animals

Slide & Surprise!: Farm

Upside Down Opposites

Danielle McLean, illus. Matt Hunt

We Love Fruit!

Becky Davies, illus. Allie Busby

Your Farm

Jon Klassen

Your Forest

Jon Klassen

Your Island

Jon Klassen

Picturebooks

Cloud Boy

Gregg Stobbs

Don't Laugh at Giraffes

Dyan Sheldon, illus. Alex Willmore

Do Not Say These Words

Frances Tosdevin, illus. Rhian Wright

Felix Found An Egg

Charlie Miller

Hannah and the Violin

Satoshi Kitamura

I Am Strong Just Being Me

Laura Dockrill, illus. Kip Alizadeh

I'm Gonna Eat a Monster

Kael Tudor, illus. Scott Wilson

Mr Norton's New Hat

Huw Lewis Jones, illus. Corey Egbert

Our Wee Place

Sophie Kirtley, illus. Ellan Rankin

The Watering Can

Julien Baer, trans. Selene Bright, illus. Marie Dorléans

We are Definitely Human

X. Fang, pub. Pushkin Press

Early Reader books

A.F. Harrold's Pocket Book of Pocket Poems

A. F. Harrold, illus. Jack Viant

Beastie Bros: The Cabbage Juice Crime

David O'Connell

Bigfoot and the Wild Boys

Jenny Pearson, illus. Aleksei Bitskoff

Blue Jelly and Strawberries

Attie Lime, illus. Kate Sheppard

Call the Puffins!: Tiny and the Cave Ghost

Cath Howe, illus. Ella Okstad

Cat and Dumpling: Home Sweet Home

Nicola Kent

Croaky: Caverns of the Gemosaurus

Matty Long

The Fantastic Intergalactic Hamster!

Rachel Morrisoe, illus. Jenny Taylor

Guardians of the New Moon. Ming and Miaow's Great Race

Eric Huang, illus. Phúng Nguyễn Quang

Guardians of the New Moon. The Year of the Rat

Eric Huang, illus. Phúng Nguyễn Quang

Marty Moose: First Class Mischief

Claire Powell

Tuck and Tina and the Lost Fortune

Jess Brallier, illus. Jack Keely

Junior books

A Sequence of Cosmic Accidents

S. A. Reyhani

The Appletree Animal Agency

Katya Balen, illus. Gill Smith

Clem Fatale Has Been Betrayed

Eve Wersocki-Morris, illus. Honie Beam

The Doomsday Club

Kevin Moran

Ella Jones vs the Sun Stealer

Lucy Edwards with Katy Birchall, illus.

Caroline Garcia

The Green Kingdom

Cornelia Funke, Tammi Hartung

Grumpfort

Jamie Hammond

The Last Dragon on Mars

Scott Reintgen

Please Don't Read the Footnotes Please

Rob Walton, illus. Reena Makwana

Rebel Heart

Ally Sherrick

Vanya and the Wild Hunt

Sangu Mandanna, illus. Kristina Kister

Wildlands

Brogan Murphy

Teen & Young Adult books

After Life

Gayle Forman

Bloodguard

Cecy Robson

Capitana

Cassandra James

Cloud Nine

Sue H Cunningham

Cruel Is the Light

Sophie Clark

Disney Wings of Starlight

Allison Saft

Nightweaver

R.M. Gray

The Notorious Virtues

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The Rose Bargain

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