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### **Books Reviewed**

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# Picture books

## **At this Very Moment**

Matthew Hodson, pub. Cicada books

At this very moment ... what a lovely phrase full of possibilities! At this very moment ... a bird just sat on my windowsill and pecked the glass. At this very moment ... my kids must be having their breaktime in the school playground. Oh! at this very moment ... the sun just disappeared behind the clouds. So, you see at this very moment a lot of things are happening.

A lot is happening in this picture book by Matthew Hodson too. As one turns the pages, it unravels a beautiful world of words and colours. There are different characters waiting to let the reader into their 'at this very moment.' From the early morning sun to the night stars the book covers a range of characters filled with colours and sounds to welcome the reader into their world. It is interesting to note that Hodson has both written the words and created the images. There is one dominant image in bold colours for each character that will appeal to the young mind. The words and the imagery sync well together to introduce new words and sounds to the young reader while at the same time allowing them to enjoy the story through the images.

Repeated readings will only enhance the reading experience as readers learn to anticipate the images and the words, thereby creating a wonderful and educating experience.

Asha

## **Book Hospital**

Leigh Hodgkinson, pub. Simon & Schuster

*Book Hospital* by Leigh Hodgkinson, is a really fun picture book all about, well, books. The front cover is really appealing with some of the wonderful textures and colours that run throughout the book, as well as the main character, a friendly little book whose world we enter.

We learn all about different kinds of books, as well as the trials and tribulations they go through at the mercy of little hands, but not forgetting the joy of story time with a grown up. When the main book character loses a very important part of their story, they are taken to the book hospital to be fixed up. The book is excellently produced by Simon & Schuster, and beautifully illustrated. I love the varied textures that Leigh Hodgkinson uses throughout the book, and the wonderful characters she has created.

I loved reading this with my youngest son. It's a story that works on a few levels: to encourage children to look after their books, as well as an insight into what a hospital is like and the twist that the actual book you're reading is also the book in the story. It will all make sense when you get to the end! I would highly recommend this wonderful story to anyone who loves books, and to encourage little ones to take good care of their books.

**Sarah Lovell**

## **The Day Fin Flooded the World**

Adam Stower, pub. Andersen Press

Have you ever forgotten just one small thing? Did it have big consequences? Adam Stower shows how this very situation can happen, with his trademark humour and brilliant style of illustration this book is positively bursting with fun. Fin leaps off the page into our homes, into the lives of our readers, the illustrations come with him and beware so do hours and hours of repeated reading fun.

Fin is forgetful. He forgets to put shoes on, instead wearing slippers to go to school. He takes off his trousers (maybe for a sport lesson) and forgets to put them back on but then one night all this changes. Fin remembers, He remembers to wash his face. He remembers to brush ALL his teeth. He remembers to feed Jules the goldfish – too good to be true? YES! Fin forgets to unplug the sink, forgets to turn the tap off ... Do you know what is coming next when you turn that page? This is the perfect moment for children to get involved with the story, guessing what they might see when they turn. What fun! First the basin, then the bathroom, the bedroom, the house, fill – what next? Can Fin undo his Oops moment? Can the world recover, will you be able to read without laughing out loud? No! Will you be coming back time and again? Yes!

A fabulous, hilarious and fantastically cautionary tale about forgetfulness for readers of all ages.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **The Dragon Who Didn't Like Fire**

Gemma Merino, pub. Macmillan

Anyone who enjoyed *The Crocodile Who Didn't Like Water* is in for a real treat with this funny and heart-warming follow up, in which find out what happened to that egg ...

The shape of the story is familiar: we encounter a dragon who is different to the rest of their family, who feels left out, and who dreams of altogether different things. Through hard work and a lucky accident, the dragon discovers who she really is. In doing so, she – and we – learn some important lessons about taking on challenges, about being true to yourself, about belonging, and about the power of unconditional love.

This very touching story, written and illustrated by Gemma Merino, can be enjoyed by readers at many different levels. From the wonderful illustrations and simple narrative, to the more challenging questions it invokes, about who we are and how we fit into the world around us there are layers of meaning and story waiting to be uncovered. It was difficult not to love the little dragon, just as much as we loved the little crocodile, both stories are fast becoming firm favourites!

**Lucy Hollins**

## **Escape: One Day We Had To Run**

Ming & Wah, illus. Carmen Vela, pub. Lantana Books

ES-CAPE (verb): To avoid a threatening evil.

Cling. Don't let go. Hold tight. Never give up. Defy. Go with your gut. Do what is right. Disregard orders. Sprint. Go. Don't linger. Leave.

Throughout history humans have had to flee their homes for survival. Written by identical twins, Ming and Wah Chen, this beautiful picture book tells twelve inspiring stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things in their fight for freedom. From Bonnie Prince Charlie's daring disguises in 1745 to the heart-breaking modern-day plight of Syria's displaced children, each heroic escape is a tale of astonishing courage.

Ming and Wah were inspired by their Chinese nanny who swam, through shark infested waters, to escape from Mainland China to British Hong Kong. Each incredible refugee and migrant story is based around an action verb. Told in a single paragraph, the accounts are simple, accessible, and always hopeful in tone. Carmen Vela's clean, graphic illustrations add to the perfect simplicity of the storytelling.

The carefully chosen stories in this book uplift and inspire whilst reminding us of the incredible lengths some people have to go to in order to escape war, famine, slavery intolerance, economic and political upheaval, or climate change. These stories are incredibly important. I am glad to be able to share them with my children.

**Abby Mellor**

## **Finn's Garden Friends**

Rachel Lawton, illus. Lia Visirin, pub. Pikku Publishing

When Finn and his mother move to live with his grandfather, in the city, Finn misses the wildlife and he thinks that he will not find anything in the built-up sprawl. However, his grandfather has a delightful surprise for him, because this grandfather has a plot in a large and wonderful allotment. Together they gradually explore not only the plant life but also discover a hedgehog and her hoglets and then a vixen and her fox cubs. The gently evocative illustrations of Lia Visirin complement this text and encourage young readers to spot not only the differences between town and country but all the different, amazing wildlife that can be seen in both places.

Rachel Lawton, the book's author, shows us that there is magic to be found even in the most urban of environments, we just need to keep our eyes open. The story is also about the range of creatures that share our space and how they are all trying to survive against the odds. The fox was trying to catch a hoglet, but only because she has her own cubs to feed. This makes a brilliant introduction to the natural world as well as being a sympathetic look at family relationships, particularly between Finn and his grandfather; but also about recognising the opportunities when change occurs.

**Margaret Pemberton**

## **Grandad's Camper**

Harry Woodgate, pub. Andersen Press

*Grandad's Camper* is a wonderful tale that celebrates love in all its forms – it's filled with colour, a passion for life, and the connection between a child and their Grandad. Author and Illustrator, Harry Woodgate has created a feast for the eyes on each page, with the colours of the rainbow present in every single spread.

Quite simply, *Grandad's Camper* highlights intergenerational understanding and love. It also - as Gramps is clearly no longer with us – brings in the topic of loss and seeing an elderly relative deal with that loss. For the parent reading it may well remind them – as it did me – the importance of young and old mixing and seeing the benefit it can have for both parties. The joy of the granddaughter and grandparent dynamic jumps off the page as does the happiness between Grandad and Gramps. I couldn't help but smile. In fact, after this past year of pandemic-forced separation it may well resonate even more for many, but I promise this is an uplifting and heart-warming story that highlights empathy, joy, adventure and understanding.

This is a book that should be on every bookshelf for the effectiveness in which it shows such empathy, the benefits of the young and old sharing time together and the fact that intergenerational love is priceless. The illustrations are stunning and full, and you will discover something new each time you read the book.

*Grandad's Camper* is Harry Woodgate's debut picture book as author and illustrator, and it is gorgeous. Every child loves hearing stories from their parents and grandparents lives before they were born. And this is that story. This is what the granddaughter loves about being with her Grandad. Harry Woodgate has hit on the spark that bonds us all whatever age we are - the magic of passing stories on to those we love, and the joy of hearing those stories and carrying them forward.

**Anja Stobbart**

## **Growing Pains**

Alison McLennan, illus. Melissa Johns, pub. EK Books

*Growing Pains* tells the lovely story of how a small child's curiosity leads to a new care and concern for the world around him.

Finn has a new tree in his garden. A little sapling. But as Finn plays at being a fire-breathing dragon, it gets so cold, his breath looks like real smoke floating in the air and his Mum calls him in. Sitting inside like a caged bear, Finn wonders if the little tree is cold? Taking his big woolly scarf, he slips outside and wraps it round the tree to keep it warm.

Next morning, eating his toast, Finn wonders if the little sapling is hungry and takes what is left of his toast to share with it but the tree doesn't eat it. 'I'll bring you something else,' Finn promises. Thinking the little tree might be lonely, Finn sits beside it for a long time asking questions which the

tree doesn't answer. At lunchtime, he offers to share his sandwiches, but the tree politely and silently refuses. That night in bed, Finn's legs ache. His Mum rubs them. 'Growing pains,' she says, 'because you're getting bigger.' Does the little tree have growing pains? When Finn's night light suddenly goes out, he is a tiny bit frightened but looking out of the window, he sees the little sapling is standing tall and straight in the moonlight, not frightened at all and now, neither is Finn.

This wonderful book is illustrated with gorgeous collage pictures and full of colour and detail. The tree is lovely with its many leaves, each one belonging to a different season. The story is told clearly and simply, easy to follow and remember and Finn is such a friendly presence, any child will warm to him – and to his dog.

*Growing Pains* is a book to keep.

**Gwen Grant**

### **The King's Birthday Suit**

Peter Bentley, illus. Claire Powell, pub. Bloomsbury

Hans Christian Andersen's story of *The Emperor's New Clothes* will be familiar to most, if not all, readers, but Peter Bentley and Claire Powell have revitalised and breathed new life into it. Peter Bentley has written *The King's Birthday Suit* in rhyme which makes it fun to read aloud and which further emphasises the humour of it.

The King, 'Albert-Horatio-Otto the Third, had so many clothes it was simply absurd.' He has 'outfits for yoga and stroking the cat' but it's still not enough and he insists on something new for his birthday. Fashion designers come from near and far, but nothing impresses him. Nothing, that is, until 'two rascals, McTavish and Mitch' turn up with the claim that they can make something special with fabric that only the wise and the clever can see. We first see the con men pretending to be hard at work weaving the special fabric while the king's staff listen at the door.

The two trick the king into agreeing that the fabric looks amazing and then get to work pretending to cut, stitch and sew – finally presenting him with an invisible outfit. The combination of Peter Bentley's text and Claire Powell's bright, fun filled illustrations then cleverly carry the action on for a further two spreads before the final reveal (the king wearing an appropriately placed sash) and there's still room for a cheeky little ending that's guaranteed to amuse and delight young readers.

A great picture book that will be a delight to read aloud to a class and with plenty to look at in the illustrations making it one to return to time and time again.

**Vicky Harvey**

### **The Lion on the Bus**

Gareth P Jones, illus. Jeff Harter, pub. Farshore

We all know the rhyme *The Wheels on the Bus* and if you don't, well you soon will but better than that you will learn a new version too – which will you choose to sing? I think I know which I will be singing from now on ... yes, this new one. Why I know you are wondering, well why not – this one is so much fun, it rhymes, it is loud, it is silly and it is in this book by a favourite, talented author and illustrator pairing. PLUS the book will have you singing along, shouting out loud, laughing and tensely wondering if you should turn the page, after all there has been a panther, a lion and a crocodile, the bus driver is scared, is turning the page going to be safe?

As the wheels on the bus go round and round all day long the lion on the bus goes roar, roar, roar (and takes some pictures too) the driver beeps, the people wave, the baby cries, the panther prowls and on it goes. Look at those pictures, see those people, getting more and more worried ... until ...

There I will leave you for I do not want to spoil the question of what will happen next but what I will tell you is that I guarantee you will love this book, you will be singing, dancing, roaring and prowling all day long and we will all be thanking Gareth P Jones and Jeff Harter for the sheer delight they have given us with this book.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

### **Little Faces: Be Careful, Dragon!**

Carly Madden, illus. Hanako Clulow, pub. Words & Pictures

*Be Careful, Dragon!* is part of the *Little Faces* series of attractive board books suitable for very young children. The book tells a sweet story of Dragon trying to control his emotions as he plays with friends in the forest. Children will be able to relate to Dragon's smoky outbursts as he gets angry and overwhelmed. Young readers are introduced to using simple breathing techniques as a calming strategy.

This is a lovely book to share with a young child. The story is told in an involving and conversational tone which encourages interaction and engagement. Circular cut-outs in the middle of each page enable a sneak peek of the next image and encourage children to want to turn over. A clever paper cut technique changes the picture as the page turns. Dragon's face goes from smiley to smoky and angry to calm. Children will enjoy turning the pages themselves and be fascinated watching the pictures transform.

The book is very visually appealing, with bold stylised images in a retro, autumnal colour pallet of burnished oranges, dusky pinks and deep leafy greens. Dragon is of the cute and charming variety with miniature wings, unthreatening fangs and big wide eyes. There are plenty of details to draw the eye, particularly the fantastical plants that curve and spread around the page's edge. This would make an ideal gift and would be appreciated by both parents and children. It would be welcome in any young child's book collection.

**Liz Speight**

### **Papa Penguin**

Lindsay Camp, illus. Momoke Abe, pub. Andersen Press

This book has both story and educational facts about penguins. Penguins may be a little over-done in children's books, this one stands out with its heart-warming story highlighting how much a father does for his child. It is big and colourful, the penguin illustrations are cute, their little hats and glasses make them relatable for human kids. I found the text clear, easy to read, working well alongside the illustrations, a nice combination.

The book starts with a sad child waiting for his overworked Dad to come home. Something many children can relate to in our fast-paced, modern world. Yet the story highlights just how much the dad sacrifices to look after his child, creating feelings of love, warmth and family in a real and positive way. The story is fantastic, though in parts very text heavy for a children's book. Some of the conversations include a lot of build up with words I don't think are essential to the story, they could have been more concise.

The book centres around the relationship between a dad and his child, so it might be specific to children with close relationships with their Dad and alienate those who don't have that privilege. Saying that, I feel like all children can appreciate and enjoy the beautiful illustrations with their warm colours and cute penguins. Even the pages full of snow seem filled with life! At the end of the story is a double page spread on penguin facts. It is a stand-alone from the story in that it doesn't directly tie in, and I'm not even sure it is needed though educational and helpful for teaching about penguin life.

Overall, the book is well written with a very poignant and heart-warming story that will be a hit with penguin lovers.

## **Izzy Bean**

### **Rita's Rabbit**

Laura Mucha, illus. Hannah Peck, pub. Faber & Faber

*Rita's Rabbit* is a delightful picture book story. It is the story of a young girl, Rita, a girl who desperately wants a rabbit, and is utterly disappointed when her grandad gifts her a bearded dragon. Rather than just accepting her new pet Rita decides that she is going to try to get rid of the dragon in various different ways. The dragon is not a rabbit and Rita is determined not to like him. But, when a surprise visitor from the house next door turns up Rita realizes rabbits are, perhaps, not her dream pet after all.

The book is excellently produced by its publisher, Faber, and beautifully illustrated throughout. I love the limited colour palette that Hannah Peck has used, her illustrations compliment the fabulous characters created by Laura Mucha perfectly and readers will be sure to fall in love with at least one of the pets by the time they have finished the book!

I loved reading this with my three children (age 12, 9 and 7) and they all enjoyed it immensely. I have since read it numerous times at bedtime with my youngest son. I would highly recommend this wonderful book to anyone who loves animals, especially bearded dragons (and maybe even rabbits)!

**Sarah Lovell**

## **The Screen Thief**

Helen Docherty, illus. Thomas Doherty, pub. Scholastic

The Snaffle is a small, sweet creature with a big, important message. But whilst big, important messages have the potential to feel preachy or obvious, Helen and Thomas Doherty play it beautifully and get this one just right. The reader, the reader of any age, will not feel that they are being preached to but they are enjoying a gentle, fun story that has an interesting and useful point to make to them.

We can pretty much guess from page two what's going to happen and how the story will end, but we are still somehow gripped as the story develops, and so does our concern for the world around us. The Snaffle struggles to make new friends because everybody is too busy staring at their screens, but she discovers that they're pretty tasty to eat. As she munches on screens throughout the city the people are forced to look to and embrace the community around them.

An amusing and touching story for all ages, *The Screen Thief* is also thought provoking for the adult readers. The Snaffle is a sweet creature, who is fun to spot on each page. She might just encourage you to put your screens away too!

**Lucy Hollins**

## **The Wind in the Willows**

Kenneth Grahame, adapted by Timothy Knapman, illus. E.H. Shepard, pub. Farshore

*Wind In the Willows* is a truly classic story, a story full of stories, stories about the four friends, Ratty, Mole Badger and Toad that have entered the realms of children's classics. This picture book adaption has been created to celebrate the 90th anniversary of E.H. Shepard's iconic illustrations.

Find inside picture book versions of many of the well-known chapters from the lives of the friends; ranging from messing about on boats to discovering motor cars, Toad in prison and of course evicting the weasels and stoats from Toad Hall – the collection would not be complete without something from the beginning, middle and end of the original. However, Timothy Knapman has managed to keep the flow of the story and an adult will not feel short-changed by this version.

This is a magical introduction to the world of the riverbank and makes a wonderful story to read aloud to the very young, before they hopefully go on to reading the full version later. The use of the wonderful illustrations by Shepard just add to the timelessness of the stories and although there has been criticism over the years about the portrayal of the 'society' I think that this maintains its place as a study in friendship, as well as accepting the new, whilst keeping the best of older traditions.

**Margaret Pemberton**

# Junior Books

## **Burning Sunlight**

Anthea Simmons, pub. Andersen Press

This compelling and passionate novel explores a number of themes through the lives of its two twelve-year-old protagonists. The dual voice first person narrative works very well to help understand their motives and concerns. Zaynab is from Somaliland, a country where drought is rife, and people are forced to live in refugee camps. Her late mother's campaigning work inspired her, and she vows to carry on, despite having to move to England with her father for six months. Settling in a small Devon town is not going to be easy. Lucas had concerns about the environment and climate change, but is unsure how to go about expressing them, especially given the scepticism of his father and their somewhat uneasy relationship.

Despite Zaynab's initial hostility/prickliness, the two become firm friends, starting up a Fridays for Future school strike group, despite opposition from the head teacher. When they discover a greenwashing plot being perpetrated by the fossil fuel company Zaynab's father is working for, which will affect the people her mother was trying to help, they know they must take their activism to another level.

As well as the climate crisis issues covered, the book also deals with family and coping with bereavement. Zaynab feels as if she alone is grieving for her mother, that her father is trying to forget her. This makes her hostile towards him and suspicious of his motives in working as a green advisor to the oil company. Her anger does lead her into risky decisions, as she can be blind to the views of others, but reconciliation with her father results in the success of the campaign. Lucas also finds respect and unexpected help from his father.

An entertaining, inspiring, and thought-provoking book for readers of 11+, with an interest in climate justice and fighting for change.

## **Jayne Gould**

### **The Caravan at the Edge of Doom**

Jim Beckett, illus. Olia Muza, pub. Farshore

The story starts in a caravan when twelve-year-old Harley visits her grandparents. They each in turn go to the toilet and disappear with a bang. The idea of exploding grandparents will appeal to many young readers. Imagine drinking a special cup of tea, eating a biscuit, visiting the toilet and boom! The start is abrupt and immediately very funny. The tale continues to be action packed and very funny throughout. It is often laugh out loud funny. In fact, it is really quite bonkers in parts. With exploding grandparents it has to be a funny and quirky story and probably best not taken too seriously. It moves along at a rapid pace and is sure to keep readers fully engaged.

There is more to this than just a madcap story. Yes, it is set in a very funny world, but it also deals with some deep and thought-provoking themes. It turns out that the grandparents are guardians of the land of the dead and the toilet is the gateway to this land. When the grandparents explode, Harley takes over as the new guardian. Then the plot deepens even further when little brother Malcolm disappears.

As well as a very entertaining plot, there are some warm and interesting characters. Overall, the story will appeal to children who like adventure, fantasy and comedy. Within a unique, extraordinary and imaginative world there is the constant threat of doom. The front cover is inviting and the black and white drawings throughout are excellent. This magical adventure is the first children's book for author Jim Beckett and there is a second instalment to come. Young readers will find this exciting and fun and perhaps even a bit scary.

**Gary Kenworthy**

### **The Exploding Life of Scarlet Fife**

Maz Evans, illus. Chris Jevons, pub. Hodder Children's Books

"I ate and I ate till I was sick on the floor.  $8 \times 8 = 64$ ."

Looking after Mr Nibbles, an adventurous class hamster, is the goal of this brilliant tale. The storyline captures the delights of modern, inclusive family life, comfortably ticking boxes with laugh-a-minute and intermittent giggles. Scarlet's ambition is to have Mr Nibbles to stay. But needing the highest number of Positivity Points from class teacher Ms Pitt-Bull puts her in a pickle. Maths is her favourite subject - all perfectly logical. English language is perfectly illogical. Scarlet's rational misconceptions of idioms and common sayings are very funny, you can't help sympathising with her.

Scarlet lives with mum and stepdad Jakub who has recently been sacked through no fault of his own - despite no sacks in sight! Auntie Rosa, mum's sister, a lawyer, plans to represent him in court, confusingly not a tennis court? Auntie Rosa plans to marry Auntie Amara a creative therapist, a brilliant listener who can diffuse Scarlet's inner turmoil. Dad, Bruce, is a graphic designer with one arm, toasters and girlfriends are challenging for him, can he meet a better match?

School is no less complicated, extending this beguiling muddle of characters who illustrate the complexities of human nature and the golden rule not to pre-judge. Ms Pitt-Bull the class teacher and Gran who thinks a text is something out of a book, prove to be the rocks in all this. Maisie her best school friend is a trainee black belt. Themes include fairness, squashed down grievances which annoyingly explode all over the place. Magical happenings and feelings like slime in a party bag that invariably leaks, drip over everything. Full of warmth and pace you can't help but love this book. A great read for 7 - 10-year-olds give or take a year in school or a family setting.

**Elizabeth Negus**

### **The Greatest Inventor**

Ben Brooks, illus. George Ermos, pub. Quercus

Every morning, Victor and his pet tortoise, Saint Oswald, climb to the top of a small mountain to watch sunrise. Victor loves the peace and quiet up there – something he doesn't get once the village of Rainwater wakes up and the day begins. Life in the village is boring and full of hard, physical work. Victor longs for something else - somewhere more interesting – somewhere he'll fit in. When Walter Swizwit, a great inventor arrives in Rainwater, Victor is excited. Excitement, however, turns to disappointment when the villagers laugh at Swizwit's inventions, call them useless and refuse to buy any. That night, Victor goes to bed feeling disappointed. Swizwit, seething with rage, sprinkles something into the well before leaving the village.

The following morning Victor find that everyone has been poisoned after drinking the well water. Victor and Saint Oswald set off after Swizwit, determined to get a cure for the villagers. On their journey, they pass through other villages which have suffered as a result of Swizwit's inventions. At each village Victor gains a new friend for his quest, and also learns about the evil collectors (creatures obsessed with money who visit the villages demanding repayment of debts - something that the people of Rainwater don't experience) who make everyone's lives a misery. Catching up with Swizwit is only the start of the adventure. Victor and his friends find that not everything is as simple and straightforward as it first appeared. They must travel to the dark fortress, home of the collectors, in the hope that they can find a cure for their villages and free them from the grip of the collectors.

With occasional illustrations George Ermos, *The Greatest Inventor* is a fun, exciting, and thought provoking read, full of interesting characters, and packed with action and adventure.

**Damian Harvey**

## **The House of Secret Treasure**

Kita Mitchell, illus. Isabelle Follath, pub. Scholastic

11-year-old George is fed up with just being average, continually outshone by his 14-year-old big sister Jess who is outstanding in absolutely everything - especially competitive swimming. Things start looking up for George when an urgent letter arrives out of the blue and he finds himself the inheritor of Hogweed Hall, built by the pirate Scurvy Legs Smallbone and home to the late Miss Mary Smallwood who he met in the park. Hogweed Hall comes complete with tenants too: Marta the unusual, agoraphobic Polish pastry chef in the basement, Dr Gupta the former geneticist from the Natural History Museum in the attic and Boris the slobbery wolfhound. Of course, Mary's sisters, Muriel and Mildred, are furious to be left out of the will and invite themselves to stay at Hogweed Hall, desperate to find something, and kickstarting a crazy, swashbuckling, action-packed adventure involving pirates, family secrets, a missing ruby, treasure maps, a 'ghost', a tropical island, a bulldozer, deception, digging, dodo DNA - and chickens.

This is a breathtakingly original adventure with perfectly pitched silliness and strongly recognisable sibling rivalries and loyalties that 8+ readers will love. The tangled plot continually veers off in completely unexpected directions without ever becoming muddled and the huge plot twist towards the end is pure genius. Very short chapters keep up the breakneck pace of the storytelling and the fun the author had in the writing shines through on every page. Superbly comic illustrations throughout by Isabelle Follath add an extra dimension of fun. Crazy imaginative and very, very clever *The*

*House of Secret Treasure* will definitely keep readers turning the pages and would make a superb class read aloud, sparking research into science, history and conservation. Miss Smallbone's chocolate tiffin recipe is thoughtfully included at the end of the book.

Excellent KS2 teacher packs focussing on heroes and villains, character motivations, sibling relationships and the triumph of good over evil are also available from Scholastic. Fingers crossed this is just the first of many hilarious adventures for George and Jess!

**Eileen Armstrong**

## **How To Save The World with a Chicken and an Egg**

Emma Shevah, illus. Kirsti Beautyman, pub. Chicken House

A key question for many of us is how do you show the awesomeness of nature? I suggest this book. Two aspects to discuss. First is the haltingly developing relationship between two isolated children, Ivy and Nathaniel, which Shevah handles as deftly as you could wish. Ivy is a fosterling with a disbelieved supernatural connection to animals, whose foster parents want her kept under the radar. Nathaniel is neurodiverse, disconnected from the boarding school he attends, and the mother his recently deceased gran wished him to reconnect with. That's the core story: people overcoming the barriers that separate them from those alongside. I don't know when Shevah began writing, but this is a quintessentially post-Covid book.

It's also an Earth Crisis book. I'm completely with this viewpoint. The construction, in the natures of the book's characters means Green issues get discussed in a concerned way, which for me is wholly appropriate. Does it preach? No. The children do explain at each other a bit, but that's what children do, I found that aspect of it genuine. There's always a narrative purpose, it's always story-first.

Stylistically, since it's two characters building their way into a relationship it fits that they share the narration, and chapters alternate between them. This works in all manner of ways: from the express equality between the characters, to allowing both characters to share themselves in their own words and not be described by others. It feels modern and right. I liked Shevah's style. Her words are snappy; immediate and flowing, with every sentence mattering. It suits the characters to tell their stories so energetically, without pretension.

It's emotional, it's heart-felt, it's funny. I always like funny, which comes not in jokes, but in the way the characters observe and talk to each other. It's well-rounded real-feeling fiction. Read to children as young as 5 or 6, expect them to read it for themselves from age 7 onwards. Meaty and cute enough to hold interest throughout primary. Recommended as a casual read for most, which will connect deeply with some.

**Dmytro Bojaniwskyj**

## **Indigo Wilde and the Creatures at Jellybean Crescent**

Pippa Curnick, pub. Hachette Children's Books

*Indigo Wilde and the Creatures at Jellybean Crescent* is the first of a new series from author/illustrator Pippa Curnick, aimed at the 7+ age range. The humour is similar to David Walliams books.

This ingenious story is about Indigo and her little brother, Quigley, who is deaf. Their parents are famous exploders who go on a lot of expeditions to the known and unknown lands leaving them home alone. They post Indigo a unique assortment of orphans and misfits, such as the yeti twins, pink Ollie and blue Umpf, whose luminous coloured fur make them highly conspicuous in the snow and the ferocious looking but kind-hearted Queenie, the sharp-clawed goblin. They all live in a massive house that is different to any of the other houses on Jellybean Crescent but none of the neighbours seem to notice. That is none but Madam Grey and her pet dog Pebbles who lives opposite.

Forty-seven Jellybean Crescent is a sanctuary where the Monster Mail deliveries can belong without being bullied or afraid. They are all listed in *The Abracadarium*, an incredibly imaginative compendium of sketches with *How To Train your Dragon* style notations of Indigo's observations on the magical creatures she has encountered. The book opens with a newspaper style article of when the Wildes found Indigo. We then meet Indigo at the age of about ten when she receives some new Monster Mail that sends the comparatively peaceful household into chaos. All the inhabitants have to pull together to solve the problem of the missing creature and the complaints from the nosy neighbour.

*Indigo Wilde and the Creatures at Jellybean Crescent* is jam packed full of beautiful illustrations guaranteed to capture even the most reluctant readers attention and bring Pippa's characters to life. There are some amazing double-page spreads for young readers to explore. This book would be ideal for all primary school book corners.

**Anita Loughrey**

Reviewer's Website: [www.anitaloughrey.com](http://www.anitaloughrey.com)

## **The Life and Time of Lonny Quicke**

Kirsty Applebaum, pub. Nosy Crow

*The Life and Time of Lonny Quicke* is the third book by Kirsty Applebaum and confirms her as an accomplished voice in the field of middle-grade fiction. Like the book that precedes it, *Troofriend*, this one belongs to the fantastic realism genre. While *Troofriend* explored a futuristic scenario - well, to a point, as it talks about artificial intelligence and android technology, *The Life and Time of Lonny Quicke* is hinged on an ancient power, inherited by a young boy.

Lonny is a Lifeling, someone who can restore health with a simple touch. However, Lonny's gift bears a high price, as every intervention limits his own life span. To protect him, his family lives in a remote house in the forest. Yet, one day Lonny and his younger brother Midge are taken to the town of Farstoke, just when the old traditional Lifeling festival is about to be celebrated. Here they strike a friendship with two sisters, Jess and Kathy, whose mother is gravely ill. Lonny is also keen to find out more about his mother, who died giving birth to Midge, and who used to live in the town. Torn between the desire to discover more about his family, the need to defend his secret, and the responsibility his gift brings, Lonny is about to leave Farstoke when certain events take over.

Full of cliff-hangers and pathos this book is going to be a great read for children looking for adventurous fantastic stories. The author is clever in maintaining a sense of impending danger while avoiding predictability. In a sense, it could be a good alternative to those readers for whom the Harry Potter series is a step too far, as in this book they would find a similar mix of mystery and a soul searching protagonist, caught in the dilemma of doing the best for those he loves and coming to terms with his destiny. The language, pace and structure of this story reveal a gift for storytelling and I am looking forward to reading more of Applebaum's work.

**Laura Brill**

### **The Magical Bookshop**

Katje Frixe, illus. Florentine Prechtel, trans. Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp, pub. Rock the Boat

When the world's worst disaster happens and her very best friend moves away just before the start of the new school year Clara finds Mrs Owl's Bookshop. The benevolent Mrs Owl, and her endless supply of chocolate cake and cinnamon swirls make things better with 'a knack for finding the perfect book for every customer before they even realise what they're looking for.' It's the perfect place for Clara when back at school a new boy has taken best friend Lottie's seat and, worse still, her new teacher is Lottie's dad's new girlfriend. Gustaf, the glass-half-empty cat who talks in rhyming couplets and Mr King, the perceptive, wise talking mirror who once belonged in the theatre are wonderful. Along comes evil antique dealer Mr Schwartz, claiming the mirror, embarking on a campaign of nasty tricks. Can Clara and her friends step in to save the day - and the bookshop?

I loved the conversational tone, the fun injected by the rhyming cat and talking mirror, the cunning, stop-at-nothing villain, Clara's family trying to cheer her up and the bookshop itself. Who wouldn't want to visit?! Serious themes interweave with a lightness of touch; saying goodbye, starting school, family break-up, finding courage for new challenges, not judging, communicating feelings, the importance of kindness, the magic of books and the overriding message that 'good friends are like cinnamon buns, you can always do with more than one.'

A perfect story for early 7+ readers, skilfully translated from German by Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp with gorgeously whimsical illustrations by Florentine Prechtel. Thought-provoking discussion questions and post-reading activities - from creating a friendship book to baking a chocolate cake - are included to extend the enjoyment of the book. Let's hope there are many more mysteries and adventures in store for Clara and Lottie!

**Eileen Armstrong**

### **Oddity**

Eli Brown, illus. Karin Rytter, pub. Walker Books

Clover Elkin was born with trouble in her blood only she doesn't yet know how much trouble – well not until the end of the first chapter. When we meet Clover she is tired, having spent days with her doctor father helping to keep a mother and her new born baby alive. Now she is trying to avoid her

father's scrutiny, to hide the Oddity that she has found and yet at the same time find out more about why her father hates them so much and how they took her mother from her. What neither of them know is that Oddities are about to take her father too and no, that is not spoiling the plot for you – believe me there is much more to come, this is just scene setting.

Clover is a marvel in a land of marvels. She lives on the edge of the United States of America and has dreams. Dreams of other places, dreams of a life packed with adventure, dreams of collecting Oddities for these are ordinary and everyday objects which have been imbued with extraordinary power. Suddenly adventure is thrust onto Clover, can she find that one oddity, the one that could start or end a war, if she can find it and use it properly that is.

*Oddity* is fantastically imagined, expertly written, and beautifully illustrated with black and white drawings. It is an adventure that draws us in, just as Clover is drawn to her Oddities. We are intrigued, we want to turn the page, to know more, to experience more, to be taken on the adventure too. A thrilling and highly original story infused with the magical power of excellent writing Clover Elkin's story will be one you will find it hard to leave behind.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **The Outlaws Scarlett and Browne**

Jonathan Stroud, pub. Walker Books

This blend of dystopian future and Wild West adventure features superb world building by master storyteller Jonathan Stroud. He has created a heroine, her companion and adventure which lives long in the memory of the reader.

Scarlett McCain has learned to survive on her wits and gunslinging skills in an England devastated by disasters. Fortified towns protect people from the horrors outside including gigantic mutant beasts and dangerous travel in vastly changed landscapes. Whilst seemingly safe havens, the towns operate under stringent rules governed by the Faith Houses. London is a lagoon filled with islands all of which are suspected to be uninhabited.

Albert Browne enters Scarlett's world and, although initially reluctant to help this strange, ungainly boy, she finds herself forming a bond with him. Pursued by indefatigable enemies, Albert is hiding a secret. A secret that others want contained, by his death if necessary. He's heard that the islands of the London Lagoon may offer him sanctuary and their journey there, aided by an old boatman and his young granddaughter, is an intoxicating blend of thrilling chases and dark humour.

A book to be savoured with anticipation of the further lawless exploits of Scarlett and Browne.

**Jayne Gould**

## **The Peculiar Tale of the Tentacle Boy**

Richard Pickard, pub. Chicken House

Marina and Edie are walking along the beach when Marina notices a light in the dilapidated pier and decides to investigate. What she finds fills her with amazement, hiding within the crumbling structure is a young boy, head crowned by tentacles, hands resembling claws. The boy, William, explains he was rescued by a kind fisherman whom he considers his father, but whose visits to the shack stopped some time ago. Marina who also greatly misses her father, lost at sea few years before, sympathizes.

Marina and William form a strong bond. She is keen to shed light on the mystery of William's origin, mindful of an old tale she used to hear from her grandmother. William moves in with Marina and her mum, the curiosity of the villagers turns into amazement at the skills the boy displays. William, initially looked at with distrust, becomes celebrated as a novel chef. Marina's mum's shop flourishes, though Marina struggles to find opportunities to play, and investigate, with this new friend.

Marina is a feisty character who doesn't hesitate to confront the villain, the intervention of unexpected help rewards her courage and determination, bringing a happy ending. What starts as a mystery, soon turns into a darker story. Jokes punctuate and no fish-inspired puns are spared in the narrative. This book is marketed for a primary school reader. Personally, I found moments which are not so light - it is likely young readers will totally overlook these, roaring instead at the endless jokes, booing villains and rejoicing at the happy ending. The publicity material includes the word quirky. I would totally agree with that and look forward to future books by Richard Pickard.

## **Laura Brill**

### **Saint Ivy: Kind at All Costs**

Laurie Morrison, pub. Amulet Books

Ivy is nice. Really nice. So nice that she's nicknamed Saint Ivy. But sometimes being nice is hard. What if being nice means breaking the rules? Or worse, what if the only thing you feel like doing is being the opposite of nice? Eighth grader Ivy has a lot going on. Her parents are divorced. Her dad has married Leo and lives in a house that couldn't be more different to the one he left behind. Her mum is carrying a baby for someone else. Her best friends seem to be spending time together without her. Ivy has lots of feelings, not all of them are nice. If Ivy isn't nice, then what is she?

With lots of messy middle grade drama – gossip, changing friendships, bullies and tough teachers – Ivy's got her hands full. Then, her mum decides to be a surrogate for her best friend and Ivy and her brother, Will, are back in the spotlight. Exactly where they don't want to be after their internet famous dad left their mum for a man who created unwanted attention for them a couple years earlier. On top of it all, mysterious emails arrive in Ivy's inbox. She'll do anything to help the mysterious downbythebay5, even if it's for all the wrong reasons.

This is a complex, reflective novel that tackles big issues. From realising you might not be who you think you are to watching old friendships dissolve to discovering the boundaries between parent-child relationships, Saint Ivy dives into the emotional side of tween problems. With a good dose of wellbeing techniques weaved throughout, stemming from Will's time in therapy, readers will experience a widely diverse cast of characters, mindful parenting and a coming-of-age story for the modern child in *Saint Ivy: Kind at All Costs*.

## **Stephanie Ward**

### **Sequins and Secrets**

Lucy Ivison, illus. Helen Crawford White, pub. Usborne

Set in the 1920s, this novel stars a dressmaking duo in a glamorous and charming story. Our story stars Myrtle, a talented dressmaker, and Sylvia, an anomaly in her own world, who are bonded by their passion for fashion and design. They both have secret dreams and desires and inspire each other to bring their dreams to life through creativity and a little bit of luck. In a life of debutant balls and reaching for the stars, these girls rely on each other for inspiration.

When Agapantha Portland-Prince wants to escape her own ball for a life of adventure, she turns to Myrtle and Sylvia for their talents and creativity to make it happen. Myrtle and Sylvia try to help Agapantha make her dreams a reality-- or will it turn out to be London's latest scandal of the ball season?

This novel introduces a variety of unique and hilarious characters, from the maids to the Duchess of the house, and each is sure to charm you into wanting to read more! The story is recommended for children ages 9-12, but children of any age are sure to love this coming-of-age novel with a propensity for hilarity. Readers can expect to fall in love with the unique characters and the friendship of the two main girls while rooting for them to reach for their dreams, and achieve them no matter what.

## **Anne Singer**

### **Something I Said**

Ben Bailey Smith, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

13-year-old Carmichael Taylor, Car for short, is muddling his way through Year 8 alongside his best friend Alex. Car could be a cool kid except ... he loves English, Language and Literature! In fact, he loves words and boy does he know how to use them. Sadly, Car's quick wittedness often lands him in trouble with teachers and parents and only Miss Miller, his English teacher, seems to recognise Car's talent. In fact, it's thanks to her that Car ends up on stage at The Wainbridge Academy Talent Show.

This is his opportunity to show the world what he's capable of, his chance at redemption, but, thanks to some unhelpful audience members, instead of his carefully planned spoken word performance Car launches into an impromptu stand-up which has the kids in stitches, the grown-ups in shock ... it's not over yet, Alex has filmed the whole thing and it's about to go global! Car is determined to chase his comedy dream, but will he be willing to pay the price for fame? And just how much does fame cost?

As we travel with Car through the London Borough of Camden to the streets of New York, every step is pure delight. Ben Bailey Smith has achieved a wonderfully vivid character in Car whose words will have you laughing and even crying out loud at times – in fact the book should come with a warning for those about to read it in public!

For those who can identify with Car and those who may be living with teenagers, this is an honest and unashamed peek into family life, friendships and learning what it is that really matters the most in life. I found it heart-warming and life affirming, a stroke of pure brilliance – honestly, I didn't want it to end!

**Tracey Corner**

# Young Adult Books

## **Boy in a White Room**

Karl Olsberg, pub. Chicken House

The chilling premise of Karl Olsberg's *Boy in a White Room* is enough to lure any reader, let alone its intended YA audience, into reading this futuristic sci-fi thriller. Not to mention it has sold over 40,000 copies in Germany alone and has since been optioned for TV development by Netflix. The story goes like this, a boy wakes to find himself locked in an enclosed white room. He has no memories, no idea who he is or how he got there. His only link to finding out the truth is through a computer-generated AI. But as the boy gradually pieces together his story – an abduction, a critical injury, a murder – the lines between reality and fantasy, truth and deception, begin to blur. Who is he really? And what lies beyond the white room...

What originally gave me serious *Inception* meets *Ready Player One* meets *Alex Rider* vibes, quickly became this bizarre, anticlimactic, down-the-rabbit-hole storyline that haphazardly weaves in the worlds of *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Matrix*. With that said, Olsberg does pack a lot of thought-provoking and philosophical themes into his short, punchy chapters. The overall journey into the protagonist's subconscious is artfully executed, and the topics surrounding identity, creation, and artificial intelligence make for fascinating conversation starters.

Fans of Ben Oliver's *The Loop* and Celia Rees's *Glass Town Wars*, and *More Than This* by Patrick Ness will enjoy this one. Also, for further reading, I read in an interview with Karl Olsberg that he was inspired by an essay by Nick Bostrom, 'Are You Living in a Computer Stimulation?'

## **Fern Tolley**

### **Curses**

Lish McBride, pub. Penguin Random House

It is obvious quite soon into the book which fairy tale inspired it. This does not make it any less readable, as Lish McBride adds sufficiently entertaining twists and turns to ensure a good pace. The tale revolves around Merit, heir to the House of Cravan who, having refused to be betrothed to the man chosen by her mother, is cursed by a godling. Merit will escape the curse which has turned her into a beast only if she will marry one of the suitors suggested by her mother or someone who loves her by the time she reaches her eighteenth birthday.

The only moments of respite are offered by a potion, distilled from the precious Caen's flower. Having taken a cutting of this precious plant from Merit's garden and been jailed for it, adventurer Florentia DuMont offers her son Tevin as security, convinced that his gift of charm will become useful, reward her family. Tevin, who has reluctantly put his good looks and gifts to the service of his dubious parents, soon realizes Merit is not sensitive to his charm. Instead, touched by Merit's predicament, he proposes to assist her in selecting her fiancé. This becomes more complicated when the heir of a royal household becomes a suitor, to fulfil the ambitious and dark plans of his parents. A cast of magical

characters bring interest and plenty of action, the plot moves briskly and brims with humorous exchanges.

While it becomes clear where true love lies, its path is a bumpy one. The plot moves along because the three main protagonists defy their parents' plans, preferring to follow their own mind and judgement, showing the shortcomings of the older generation. This tale has been updated, creating modern and inclusive characters.

A light, entertaining read to curl up with and enjoy.

## **Laura Brill**

### **Destination Anywhere**

Sara Barnard, illus. Christiane Fürtges, pub. Macmillan

Sara Barnard's novel tackles an issue which, if we're honest, we've all experienced to some extent or other. Literally a journey through unhappiness and uncertainty. Peyton's search for a destination – anywhere – to release her from seventeen years of, at best, others ignoring her, and, at worst, outright bullying, takes her on an awesome expedition towards resolution (and Canada). Surely every reader will recognise at least something and empathise with her dilemma.

With parents who want only the best for their daughter, involving academia and a career route which isn't what she craves, and her own apparently immutable ability to pick the wrong people as friends, she is left frustrated, insecure, and fearful that she can ever stop unwittingly exacerbating her unhappiness. What would we do if we could? Take off to Canada of course, alone, with a cold winter approaching, knowing no-one other than an estranged grandfather.

Peyton describes her journey – physical and psychological – to and within Canada, Barnard interweaves other voices to describe the events which have led to her desperate decision. We see how, in a desperate attempt to be one of the group of 'friends' she is trying to impress, the situation gradually ramps up, until Peyton herself is out of her comfort zone, and in serious danger. Wide-open places increasingly feature in the Canadian chapters showing us how Peyton gradually regains a belief in herself, and her ability to understand and relate to others. Key to her recovery is art – the art which she wanted to pursue when her parents could only see A Level stars. Interspersed in the chapters are Peyton's (Fürtges') drawings, showing us how the friendships she finds on her journey expand her mental and physical landscape.

*Destination Anywhere* pulls no punches, and offers no saccharine solution, but is an inspiring and restorative YA novel.

## **Bridget Carrington**

### **The Great Godden**

Meg Rosoff, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Do you remember summers when you were young? The sort of summers that you longed for all year around, and which seemed to go on forever. Summers which always appeared to last an eternity, rather than the fleeting few weeks of freedom they really were. Well, prepare yourself to be taken back to such a time. Meg Rosoff's dreamy portrayal of a summer on the Suffolk coast makes you feel like you too are back in your teens, maybe you still are.

The story is narrated by a character who remains nameless and genderless throughout, choosing to tell us more about the world that happens around them rather than indulging us too much into their own life. This mystery storyteller paints a picture of all the happenings at their family's summer house, a place that sounds so whimsical that I imagine it would fit just as well in Tolkien's Middle Earth as it does in rural England. We learn that this summer is one of many, all spent by the sea with family and friends. Until, that is, the arrival of the Godden's. Arriving from LA, these sons of a fading Hollywood star turn things upside down. Teen hormones run rife, as hearts are melted and broken in equal measure, in a rite of passage into adulthood.

This book is a wonderful snapshot into a summer that many could only dream of, then or now. But which, nevertheless, will leave you longing for the long days of summer that once were. Much like the aforementioned summers I didn't want this book to end.

While this book is aimed at teens, and will no doubt be devoured by young readers across the globe, I feel that it would be equally well received by readers of all ages.

**Rosie Cammish Jones**

## **Let's Go Swimming on Doomsday**

Natalie C. Anderson, pub. Rock and Boat

Abdi grew up in Mogadishu, Somalia, his father telling him stories of a peaceful city, a plentiful sea full of fish. Then Al Shabaab, a militant Islamic group waged war against the Government and the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), resorting to terrorism. Abdi's brother, abducted by Al Shabaab boys, is photographed in Mogadishu, AMISOM. An American, possibly a CIA agent, needs Abdi to infiltrate Al Shabaab and the safety of Abdi's family depends upon his success.

The story alternates between Abdi, remembering his recent past and, now aged sixteen, meeting Sam, a social worker in Sangu City, Kenya, hoping to find a family to take him in. Slowly Abdi's timelines converge, complicated by his growing friendship with Muna, a Somalian girl traumatised by the conflict and suffering different consequences, ostracised and heavily pregnant. The alternating chapters build tension, gradually revealing the depth of Abdi's involvement in Al Shahaab and a growing sense of pessimism. Caught between two powerful forces, Al Shabaab and the American supported AMISOM, faced with seemingly impossibly life or death choices Abdi holds little hope of survival and is resigned to his fate, despite the raging injustice of his predicament. The book explores the shadowy nature of conflict and terrorism, with supposedly good guys deeply implicated in clandestine operations and human right abuses.

The title cleverly disguises the final twist in the story, strangely looking forward to a future date, when the rest of the book is one of memory and circled in Sam's calendar, whose relationship with Abdi

seems so transient. Doomsday is December 16th. And swimming is pivotal, but again so cleverly written: it is only after finishing the book that you fully appreciate the title's significance.

*Let's Go Swimming on Doomsday* is a gritty, challenging, but worthwhile read offering a message of redemption.

## **Simon Barrett**

### **The Lucky List**

Rachael Lippincott, pub. Simon & Schuster

Rachael Lippincott's *The Lucky List* follows the main character, Emily's, struggle with grief, friendships, and sexuality; this refreshing YA fiction is gripping from the offset and is a great summer read! One of the most prominent themes Lippincott deals with is grief; after losing her mother, Emily is desperate to keep a connection with her and keep her memory alive which does by finding her mum's high school summer bucket list. Whilst exploring the pain of grief, Lippincott introduces a sense of hope for Emily as she develops a deeper connection with Blake and slowly overcomes her grief by discovering her own identity.

One of my highlights from this book is the relationship between Emily and Blake; Lippincott beautifully describes how these two girls grow together and grapple with their sexual identities. Using a slower paced style of writing allows the reader to fully understand the complexity of love and relationships which Emily herself is dealing with.

Lippincott's descriptive writing style is particularly effective in this book as descriptions of Emily's small country town demonstrate the importance of community and friendship, especially during Emily's journey to self-realisation and identity.

*The Lucky List* is a captivating read which is sure to draw readers in with Lippincott's poignant writing style and emotional plot; I would highly recommend this YA fiction with its perfect summer setting and LGBTQ representation after Pride Month.

## **Jemima Henderson**

### **Not My Problem**

Ciara Smyth, pub. Andersen Press

Set in Ireland, *Not My Problem* is the story of Aideen, a sixteen-year-old girl who has trouble fitting in at school. She doesn't have any friends, apart from her best friend Holly, and it feels as though Holly is drifting away from her. But when Aideen stumbles across the aggressively high-achieving Maebh having a meltdown in the school bathroom, she feels compelled to help her with the problem of her over-scheduled life by pushing her down the stairs. Once she has helped Maebh, word gets around and suddenly all kinds of other people are coming to Aideen with their problems: from deleting incriminating messages off confiscated mobiles, to helping them sneak out to parties. Of course, none of them know about Aideen's own problems—that she's not sleeping and barely scraping by at school

because she's so worried that her Mum is going to start drinking again. The set-up is similar to *Sex Education*: Aideen becomes the 'fixer' who helps people with their problems in exchange for a favour, but the only problems she can't solve are her own.

*Not My Problem* is a hilarious comedy of heists, schemes and inventive excuse notes to get out of PE, with a great ensemble cast from the charming Holly, the intense and dislikeable Maebh (who Aideen finds herself inexplicably attracted to), and the irrepressibly positive Kavi, to Aideen herself—stubborn, independent, fiercely loyal and struggling. This is also a wonderfully warm and authentic story about learning to let people in and ask for help when you need it.

**Rebecca Rouillard**

## **The Paper Girl of Paris**

Jordyn Taylor, pub. HarperTeen

A moving story set in present day and mid twentieth century Paris. The book introduces us to two 16-year-old girls on the cusp of youth. In the modern day, Alice is visiting Paris for the first time to settle family matters left by her grandmother who recently passed away. There is also sixteen-year-old Adalyn who no longer recognizes Paris. Everywhere she looks there are Nazis, every day a new horror. We follow the journey of both girls through their alternating perspectives we see Paris in turmoil, we see lives in turmoil and we see two young girls who are trying to fight their way through it all to find out who they are and what they can do to protect those they love.

Guided by her quest to find out what happened to her grandmother's family during the Second World War, Alice finds herself on a journey that seemingly links to the character of Adalyn whose story we learn throughout the book, told through alternating chapters from her perspective during the Nazi occupation of France that raises and answers many questions for Alice and her loved ones. Weaving mystery, intrigue, romance, family and friendship, this book is a must read for YA historical fiction lovers.

Beautifully written, *The Paper Girl of Paris* readers will find themselves falling in love with Paris, wanting to know more about the history of this wonderful city though the ups and downs of its recent past and at the same time they will find themselves attached to our two protagonists. You will be fighting their corner, willing them to be the winners and hoping that you too, one day can visit the ever-beautiful Paris.

**Avi**

## **Six Crimson Cranes**

Elizabeth Lim, pub. Hodder and Stoughton

This is a sweeping and beautiful YA fantasy retelling of the Grimm Brothers' *The Six Swans* fairytale, blended with East Asian folklore.

Shiori'anma, the sixteen-year-old sole princess of Kiata, has a secret. She lives at court with her father, six older brothers and her beautiful, cold stepmother, Raikama and no one knows that she can perform forbidden magic.

On the morning of her unwanted betrothal, Shiori makes a paper crane flutter to life which escapes her sleeve. This tiny act of magic begins a chain of events which allows her to escape the wedding, for now at least. But she has drawn her stepmother's notice. Raikama is a sorceress herself who will stop at nothing to avoid detection. Indeed, she succeeds in banishing Shiori from Kiata, making her unrecognisable, and ensuring her silence under threat of death to her brothers – now transformed into six crimson cranes. For every word that escapes her lips, one of her brothers will die.

Silent and penniless, Shiori must go after her brothers and find a way to survive. Her quest to heal her kingdom from the dark forces massing against it means she must trust her paper bird, a young, shapeshifting dragon, and the very boy she was trying not to marry. Most of all, she will need to trust her instincts and her magic to see what is truly happening.

Enchanting and lyrical, this book offers young adult readers an immersive tale of grit and adventure with a princess who will win their hearts.

## **Saira Archer**

### **Small Favors**

Erin A. Craig, pub. Penguin Random House

*Small Favors* is about deep desires and the consequences of them coming true at the hands of mysterious creatures. Ellerie Downing is a resident of the close-knit community of Amity Falls - a small town in the Blackspire Mountain range, surrounded by a dark and mysterious forest. Ellerie and her family are friendly with the townsfolk, always there for each other. The early Amity Falls settlers once fought off monsters in the woods, and established a set of rules - listed at the beginning of the book - to keep the residents safe.

Ellerie has deep desires, and for a small price a mystical creature promises her that her wishes will come true. But as Autumn turns to Winter, strange things start to affect the town - rotting crops, disfigured animals - and this strains relationships. Knowing this is an adaptation of Rumpelstiltskin will, for some readers, help understand the direction of the narrative. But, to say it is a re-telling, would be a disservice to Erin A. Craig's writing style is immersive, and in a way, the small-town setting is a metaphor for the book enveloping its reader in its atmospheric narrative.

A large group of characters in a small-town setting - each with their own shared subplots - adds to the drama, and actively involves the reader. The pace of the narrative is good too, the slow-building plot adds tension and leaves its readers with eyes glued to its pages, with a desire to find out what happens next as Ellerie finds herself in a race against time to save her family, friends and fellow townspeople from the sinister intentions of the mystical creatures. Some scenes may be sensitive to younger readers - with some violence, and the moralistic battle between desires and favours. A brilliant page-turning, thrilling read.

**Chris J Kenworthy**

## **The Summer We Turned Green**

William Sutcliffe, pub. Bloomsbury

From the very first page, it's clear these characters will be enjoyable. Luke and Rose are a brilliant sibling duo, balanced somewhere between antagonism and alliance. Their mix of indifference, frustration and unexpected affection creates an amusing thread through the book, while much else about their lives begins to go awry. Opposite their house is a soon-to-be demolished dwelling, occupied by climate activists who want to stop the construction of a new runway on the nearby airport. Rose joins the protestors and their dad follows, Luke soon heads across the road to investigate, and hopefully bring them back.

What follows is a funny tale of family, and an important read to bring awareness to the urgency of climate breakdown. It is a call for immediate action from those governments and corporations in power, alongside all of us able to reconsider the impact of what we consume in our daily lives. When Luke meets Sky among the activists, they seem an unlikely pairing. But seeing her determination and perception, he begins to question his dismissal of their efforts. As the protest escalates, they must face police brutality, climate crisis deniers, and the perils of mainstream media.

Sutcliffe's book encourages us to examine the damage done to future generations as the planet continues to decline. But alongside this, we must also bring awareness to how the impact of the climate crisis differs internationally. There is a stark divide between the West, where most harmful emissions originate, and countries in the global south that are most badly affected.

As well as a call to action, this homage to the school strikes for climate is a fun read. It leads us to remember our place among ecosystems that are centuries old, and may just give you a serious case of tree house envy ...

**Jemima Breeds**

## **These Hollow Vows**

Lexi Ryan, pub. Hodder & Stoughton

This is a departure from Lexi Ryan's accustomed genre – winner of the US award for the Best Contemporary Romance in 2018, she has written over thirty adult romances. Her venture into YA bears the hallmark of a writer accustomed to creating steamy romance, readers be prepared!

We first meet Brie (no, not the smelly cheese, but a human called Abriella) as a burglar, attempting to steal enough money to pay the extortionate rent she and her younger sister Jas owe. The penalty for failing to produce the money is harsh, resulting in Jas being whisked away into a faery land where she is at the mercy of a sadistic king. Brie is determined to fetch her back, but, not surprisingly, the faery world is complicated (for starters there are rival courts with a variety of pretenders to the thrones), and humans enter at their peril. Never a girl to flinch at the thought of a tricky situation Brie infiltrates the Seelie Court, rival to the Unseelie Court (yes, really!) where Jas is held prisoner. A

major surprise awaits her there, and Ryan is on home turf, with an evolving romance which dominates the rest of the book.

The opening chapters are laden with what seem to be passing references to traditional fairy tale and fantasy, many with a strong resemblance to the Cinderella story. Versions of Narnia's wardrobe, and Alice's rabbit hole appear, and there are slight glimpses of Harry Potteresque items (interactive morphing books) and Dracula! There is more than a touch of Disney in the descriptions of Brie's clothes, particularly her flimsy floaty ball gowns, and I couldn't read the descriptions of enchanted palaces and their gardens without a mental image of the iconic Disney castle. The final pages heavily hint at a sequel, which will undoubtedly find favour with avid faery/romance readers!

## **Bridget Carrington**

### **Things To Do Before the End of the World**

Emily Barr, pub. Penguin Random House

Everybody has learnt that the world is likely to come to an end in less than a year, on a specific date. Courtesy of climate catastrophe, 'the Creep' will change the atmosphere, poisoning everything in its path. There is an official warning spanning the globe. How people deal with the intervening months is down to them.

Against this backdrop, 'boring-as-hell Olivia Lewis, the girl everyone forgot' has her own tussles: 'go meekly' as usual, or 'rage against the dying of the light'. (For re-imagining the context of this quotation alone, this dystopian plotline deserves an enthusiastic thumbs-up.) While everyone plans one final summer of travel, festivals, parties, shy, awkward Olivia is afraid of time running out before she has lived and loved. Her heart secretly belongs to Zoe; she writes emails that she never sends. However, she finds the courage to play Juliet to Zoe's Romeo, in an all-female production. Afterwards, in the glow of success, she wants 'to be like Juliet because she knew her own mind and did her own thing.' Then, like a questionable fairy godmother, Natasha, a cousin Olivia didn't know existed, turns up. She is confidence personified, everything Olivia wants to be and more. One of her attributes is 'magic'. Deceitfulness runs through her like a stick of rock. She teaches Olivia tricks to give her boldness and, for a while, Olivia becomes the person she thought she wanted to be.

The intricacies of the plot begin to tighten from a slow build. The reader is transported to vividly drawn Madrid and Paris, where the novel speeds into a pacey, atmospheric thriller.

Surprisingly, this is a life-affirming novel. Olivia learns what is important. After all, if precious time was really running out, wouldn't we want to face it hopefully, being true to ourselves and surrounded by those we love?

## **Jackie Spink**

### **Tsunami Girl**

Julian Sedgwick and Chie Kutsuwada, pub. Guppy Books

Julian Sedgwick and Chie Kutsuwada have co-authored a powerful part young-adult novel and part manga, telling the story of the Great East Japan earthquake of 11 March 2011 and its aftermath. Told from the point of view of Yuki (or rather, Yūki – Hepburn romanisation of Japanese words being adopted throughout), a quarter-Japanese British girl who is caught up in the disaster when visiting her manga-artist grandfather in his home on the Fukushima coast.

The story falls into three parts. The first tells of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami, which Yūki barely survives. This is an account that treads a difficult path between doing justice to the horrific nature of the disaster, in which more than 15,000 people died, and making it at least somewhat intelligible for those readers (happily, most of us) who have never been involved in such an event. The second describes Yūki's faltering recovery, in the United Kingdom, from the trauma; the third, her cathartic return to the scene on the anniversary of the disaster, and her attempt to find closure for herself and her grandfather.

Writing a book that crosses cultures is never easy, and I commend the skill of this one in conveying something of the differences between British and Japanese modes of thought, without in any way becoming a cultural textbook. The book's melding of Western psychology, Japanese folk-beliefs concerning household ghosts and fox spirits, and Yūki's manga about the super-hero Half Wave, is deftly done. As for the events that occur in Fukushima's radioactive exclusion zone, whether genuinely supernatural or products of Yūki's and her friend Taka's traumatised minds as they try to make sense of the unthinkable is a point for readers to draw their own conclusions on – or, better perhaps, to refrain from doing so. Kūki o yomu no wa hitsuyō desu ne.

## **Catherine Butler**

### **You & Me at the End of the World**

Brianna Bourne, pub. Scholastic

A coming-of-age story where quiet girl meets hot crush-worthy boy in a seemingly barren and apocalyptic world, *You & Me at the End of the World* tells the story of Hannah and Leo and their exploration of an abandoned place where they can discover, and truly be themselves, whilst searching for answers to find out what has happened to everyone else they know.

Hannah has woken up in silence, the entire city is empty. There is only Leo. No parents, no friends, no school, the pair are free to do as they wish, they no longer need to play a role, to try and be something that everyone else expects of them. Hannah doesn't have to try and be an over-achieving ballerina and Leo no longer has to be a slacker guitarist. Leo is honest and fun, drawing Hannah out of herself and with this comes the opportunity for Hannah to show Leo that he too can be more.

Attracted to one another from the get-go, we are given glimpses into how each feels about the other, swapping between their perspectives each chapter. The romance that blooms between them is sweet and what seems like a typical science fiction genre read quickly takes a direction that I did not expect in the slightest! Be warned however, it is not all cosy and harmless, nothing is quite as it seems and the pair need to learn what is going on.

A story about finding love and self-love in the most unexpected of places makes for a great, quick and engaging read.

**Avi**

# Non-Fiction Books

## **Allies: Real Talk About Showing Up, Screwing Up, And Trying Again**

Eds. Shakirah Bourne, Dana Alison Levy, pub. Dorling Kindersley

Being an ally, having an ally, what does it mean, truly? As this book sets out in its introduction it is complicated because it means different things to different people and in different circumstances which of course makes it even more important to talk about. That is what this book does. It introduces us to 17 authors of young adult fiction who have each contributed an essay, a personal account of things that have happened to them, they are real people, these are their real experiences, but they are all experiences that involve allies.

I must admit that on looking at the contents page the names were not any that I knew, that however does not matter for these essays are from the heart, they are about things that go wrong, things that get fixed, people who have tried and then tried harder. They are about being there for a friend, for a stranger, featuring racism, disability, about speaking out and finding a voice. I found it gritty, tough, and yet surprisingly freeing and liberating to read. As with any non-fiction it is not a title to sit and enjoy cover to cover in your favourite cosy chair, but it is a book with a voice, a book to be shared, to be explored.

It is very much a book for older children. Possibly even aged 16+, the top end of our readership but it is also one that could be used to great effect in secondary school PSHE lesson, under the guidance of a teacher or librarian who takes examples from the stories shares them, using them as starting points for discussion. This is an important book with no easy answers, lots of questions, and an important message – we are all in this together.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **Clare Beaton's Make Your Own Castle**

Clare Beaton, pub. b small publishing

Clare Beaton has many books to her name, mostly books with which young children can interact in some way or other. Among her many and varied series for KS1 children, the *Make Your Own* books provide all that any young potential architect, designer and historian could need to learn about history, farming and special buildings. While there is a lot of colouring and cutting involved, which will keep the young audience (and their adults) busy, there's also quite a few pages of brightly illustrated, and often funny, information about the subject of the book.

In the case of *Make Your Own Castle* the book's brightly coloured card covers are designed to be transformed into the body of the castle, while the inner thicker card pages provide additional parts of the castle, and the thinner card pages offer many additional objects which readers would find if they were transported back in time to join in with the life of an active castle. Of course, a castle wouldn't be much use without people, so we have knights in armour and on horseback, peasants and pigs (27 items in all) to colour and inhabit it! Those parts of the book have to be cut out once they're coloured,

and again, some oversight and assistance is likely to be needed from the older members of the household or class. There are instructions on paper pages at the front of the book to help readers understand what to do (again, these may well need an older helper to explain), and a glossary at the end, to explain all those unfamiliar words. The eight information pages are paper, so they don't get mixed up with the colouring, cutting out and folding parts of the book. Readers can also design their own coat of arms. When they've done all this, they can turn their hand to making their own sword and shield. As well as ordinary and colouring pencils, and scissors for careful cutting, tracing paper is needed for some of the activities.

This series is well thought out, informative and fun. What more could you want?

**Bridget Carrington**

## **The Dinosaur Awards**

Barbara Taylor, illus. Steve Collins, pub. Frances Lincoln Children's Books

Are you ready? Take your seat. It is time for the dinosaur awards to begin and you need the best seat in the house to be sure that you will get the best view of the fifty fabulous dinosaurs superbly brought to life by cartoonist Steve Collins who brings these extinct creatures to life in an accessible and friendly style. He uses the text to pick out their important and significant features too. For example, we have the Archeopteryx, winner of the best flight award and we see why – the wings are distinctly prominent in the illustration. Plus, every dinosaur is given their very own mini comic strip adventure, their own portrait and so much more besides. The illustrations were what caught my eye immediately that I opened the book. Then I thought perhaps I should read the text too. Fascinating.

Each dinosaur comes with a checklist of facts – from how to pronounce the name – some are quite challenging – I am sure Pachycephalosaurs is a tongue twister but apparently it is said PACK-ee-KEF-ah-low—SORE-us. This is a veggie dinosaur, in fact did you know many of them were? We then hear more about each of the dinosaurs, in fact this book is so packed with facts it could take many readings to take them all in which is exactly what I recommend. Read, read and read again, this is a book to be enjoyed over many, many readings, for it is simply packed with detail. Additionally, if you are not sure where to go first try the gallery of winners, pick your dino, turn to their page (double page spread) and enjoy the facts, then go back for more – a great concept for a content page.

In summary a book I love, a book all children will love, a book a great many adults will love too. A book packed with facts. A brilliant, original book.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

## **How to Be a Vet**

Dr Jess French, illus. Sol Linero, pub. Nosy Crow

*How to Be a Vet* is the type of book that children will love to show their classmates in circle time. Not only does this book outline the various important and different jobs that vets take on across different professions, but even goes into a short history of the veterinary practice that will peak the curiosity of

both kids and adults alike. I had no idea how many unique tools vets use within their practice on a daily basis to keep our pets healthy!

The illustration is simple yet captivating; the cartoons are inclusive and include a variety of interesting scenes. Not only will this story have children interested in STEM, but includes a discussion on the emotional aspect of being a vet as well. Through the incorporation of facts and a variety of vet jobs, from physiotherapists and bug wranglers to zoo designers and vets on film sets, this book shows children how to combine their passions to create their dream job of working with animals. Not only does this book show children the possibility of being a vet, but how professional veterinarians have the option of working throughout a variety of different fields.

There is also a great addition at the end including suggestions for volunteering! This is a wonderful way to get children involved right away in community projects. I've suggested this book already to my younger cousins-- it is sure to be a hit!

**Anne Singer**

### **Little Brown Bear: It's OK to Make Mistakes**

### **Little Brown Bear: It's OK to Need a Friend**

Georgia AnnelieseDraws, pub. Wide Eyed Editions

The Little Brown Bear is a guide for children, he is a friend who is there to hold their hands, he is a friend who is there to see them through the ups and downs of being a child, to take them on a journey of discovery and learning. Childhood can be a challenging time for some children with so many new experiences to face and understand, charming books and books that form a series, like The Little Brown Bear can give them a familiarity they need to help them navigate the ups and downs that they are certain to face. One of the things I love the most about this series is the comfort it brings.

Mistakes we all make them because we are all human and because we want to try new things – maybe you will try baking cookies and they don't quite work out? It's okay, they could well be fine and so we follow Bear as he makes mistakes, learns from them and continues to have support from all his friends.

Friendship helps us, as readers, learn what it means to be a friend. It may be that you lift one another, that you are there to offer help or a hug. There are so many things that a friend is there for, the good times and the bad and with Bear we can explore them, all.

The delightful books are a pair that I hope will be followed by more, more books featuring Bear and his friends, more books to gently assist our young readers to navigate the ups and downs of growing up in an accessible and kind way.

**Louise Ellis-Barrett**

### **Masters of Disguise: Can you Spot the Camouflaged Creature?**

Marc Martin, pub. Walker Books

In the twinkling of a chameleon's eye this book will have you in its clutches. Did you know that chameleons are blessed with 360-degree vision and an ability to see backwards and forwards at the same time? They and others like them can blend into their habitat as masters of disguise, silently watching. The star of the show must be the Mimic Octopus. If bullied by a damselfish she'll mimic a sea snake, its natural predator! And we humans think we are so clever. All very 'cloak and dagger', the book is full of rarely known facts, which my six-year-old granddaughter delights in amazing us with. "Did you know that ...?" You laugh, but you will find yourself doing the same! Do you know where the plumicorns of an owl are situated, or which animal has a tree fridge, or what a Wobbegong really is? Whatever you do don't step on one. Search and find these masters of disguise that blend into their habitat. There are twelve world location quizzes to choose from. Aged 5 or 75 this is unputdownable.

Marc Martin is an award-winning illustrator, artist and author this, his latest will be an ideal addition to a library, school or home. The black text on a spacious white background is contained within small parcels of detailed information. These snippets are encased in gorgeous graphics starring the candidate in the spot light be it a Three-toed Sloth, a Panther Chameleon, a Gaboon Viper or my favourite the Ornate Wobbegong and eight more. This makes the absorption of facts so much easier.

Whilst you try to find the hidden ones within their native habitat Marc introduces you to more unfamiliar names, including a Helmet Vanga, Schlegel's Asity, Cotinga and Oropengola for starters. *Masters of Disguise* is a mine of information. Did you know that there is an insect that squirts a peanut butter, toffee odour in the direction of its enemies? My goodness I would be its friend for life.

**Elizabeth Negus**

## **Myths, Monsters and Mayhem in Ancient Greece**

James Davies, pub. Big Picture Press

The story of Ancient Greece and their myths is a core part of every primary school. Although there are huge numbers of books about the subject, it is always good to find a new, exciting and very readable text for the primary age group. The book is a balance between history and explanation, interspersed with retellings of some of the major myths that we are all familiar with; these include Pandora's Box, Theseus and the Minotaur and The Trojan Horse.

This is a delightful book; the chapters alternate between the facts and the stories and there is a slightly different format for each element. James Davies, who both wrote and illustrated the book, used digital techniques to create the images. The story elements of the myths are in a comic/graphic format, with a mixture of speech bubbles and narration boxes, whilst the factual sections are large blocks of text and illustration, each dealing with an aspect of the theme. There is a subtle humour in much of the narration and the illustrations also allow us to smile at the antics of the gods and heroes. This was a joy to read.

**Margaret Pemberton**

## **Out of the Blue: How Animals Evolved from Prehistoric Seas**

Elizabeth Shreeve, illus. Frann Preston-Gannon, pub. Walker Books

The first impression as soon as you see this book is definitely; BLUE. Which is probably good as the title is *Out of the Blue* and the subject is prehistoric seas. It isn't something that I would pick up unless I was searching that subject specifically, yet it was a great pleasure and will appeal to children, a nice, big book for holding and reading, it is exceptionally high quality. The art dominates this book and features beautiful, if haunting, illustrations of sea creatures in a watercolour style. There is an unusual mix of painted creatures and simple outlines which works very well. Every animal has a dark, black hole as an eye which gives them a cold and distant expression, although this may be done on purpose to enhance the feeling of being deep under the sea. Frann Preston-Gannon has managed to bring colour, detail and life to every page and I enjoyed spending time just looking at all of the different creatures. My favourite illustration is the complex yet charming parade of creatures sprouting from the sea. Utterly beautiful.

The story is a journey through life on Earth told by the seas, starting with of microbes and ending with humans. The book is easy to understand, written in a fun and simple style that children will be able to follow with ease. Each period is clearly noted and dated, and alongside the fantastic illustrations are fun, surprising comparisons with modern-day humans. Its jam packed with facts, appealing for repeated reading. With lots of big words (names in particular, like Tetrapods, Nautiloids, cartilaginous, etc.) it is probably a book to share with an adult.

A superb book with that magic combination of good writing, good illustrations, and good quality. Even if you aren't looking for factual or educational books, I'd recommend this one.

## **Izzy Bean**

### **The People's Painter: How Ben Shahn Fought for Justice with Art**

Cynthia Levinson, illus. Evan Turk, pub. Abrams and Chronicle Books

This biographical book celebrates the life of Lithuanian/American artist Ben Shahn telling the story of his life from his childhood in 1900's Lithuania through to his death in America in 1969, where he had become known as 'the people's painter'. Levinson adeptly narrates Shahn's life in an engaging and informative way, allowing the reader to relate to this artist and understand why he devoted his life to telling people's stories, especially those of unfairness and injustice, despite his teachers telling him to stick to producing beautiful landscapes.

The experience of having his father banished to Siberia when he was four determined that he would use his talent for painting and photography to depict those people overlooked and fight for justice for them. His work was so powerful that Franklin D. Roosevelt's government employed him to show how those in need, the outsiders of main society – the refugees, working poor, prisoners, etc lived in the Great Depression. His work was so successful that it brought about both legal and societal changes. Ironically, just two decades later another US government also considered Shahn's work to be powerful but this time he was investigated for being un-American because he 'disloyally' showed people the shadowy outskirts of US society and not "America the Beautiful".

Despite, or maybe because of this reaction to his work, Shahn continued to portray civil rights protestors, political prisoners, and the working communities of America – he becomes one of America’s artist activists.

**Natalie J. McChrystal Plimmer**

## **The Perfect Shelter**

Clare Helen Welsh, illus. Åsa Gilland, pub. Little Tiger Press

A heart-warming picture book about the love between two sisters. Together they build a shelter in the woods, but the younger sister soon realises something is wrong, her elder sister is unwell. We see the young girls’ confusion and sadness paralleled by the deterioration of the shelter they built as her sister’s condition becomes worse and she is taken to hospital for an operation. We see the patient begin to rebuild her life as her health improves symbolised by the building of another shelter in her hospital room with the help of a nurse. Throughout the book the word cancer is not mentioned. The reader can see the clues in the headwear that appears in the illustrations, of the nature of the illness. This ‘show not tell’ technique highlights how the young sibling does not understand what is wrong with her sister.

Åsa Gilland’s illustrations also successfully portray the passing of time as we are taken through the seasons with autumnal colours, seeds and berries and the arrival of the wind and rain to the deep winter hues when her sister begins to get stronger in the hospital after her operation.

This book would be perfect for PSHE sessions for instigating discussions on family illness and the complicated emotions felt by the family. There is an overall feeling of hope and expectation that the elder sister will beat her illness.

## **Anita Loughrey**

Reviewer’s Website: [www.anitaloughrey.com](http://www.anitaloughrey.com)

Anita Loughrey’s next books are the last two books of *A Year in Nature* series *Squirrel’s Autumn Puzzle* and *Fox’s Winter Discovery* to be released Sept 21st 2021

## **That's Life!: Looking for the Living Things all around you**

Mike Barfield, illus. Lauren Humphrey, pub. Laurence King Publishing

Join Sherlock Ohms on his fascinating search for the range of amazing organisms present on our planet. This book is the ideal addition to any KS2 classroom as a valuable resource to teach about plants, animals including humans, living things and their habitats, as well as evolution and inheritance. There is so much detail and interesting snippets of information about the diversity of life. I feel it would also be a great addition to a KS3 pupil’s bookshelf.

Mike Barfield starts at the very beginning by outlining the seven signs of life and how the perfect conditions helped form the first cell over 4 billion years ago. He explains how this cell evolved and developed in complexity to become prokaryotic (of a bacterium) or eukaryotic (of an animal). He goes on to describe how the human body is formed of 37 billion cells, distinguishes between the different

classification of life from archaea to animalia and outlines evolution to extinction. Throughout the book there are graphic novel style life stories to help explain our origins and the philosophy of life.

The illustrations by Lauren Humphreys are very distinctive and portray the characters in a charming yet eye-catching simplistic way. They complement and enhance the text perfectly helping eager young minds assimilate the multitude of insightful information. This book highlights the incredible variety of life on our planet in a fun and motivational way. It would be the ideal gift for a child interested in biological science.

### **Anita Loughrey**

Reviewer's Website: [www.anitaloughrey.com](http://www.anitaloughrey.com)

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### **This Book Is Cruelty Free: Animals and Us**

Linda Newbery, pub. Pavilion

Linda Newbery is already a writer with a reputation for novels such as the series beginning with *Some Other War*. This however is her first foray into non-fiction. The book is best described as a guide for people who are interested in and perturbed by the way human actions and negligence are affecting our planet and its non-human inhabitants. The book also explores just what any one individual can do to help remedy our current situation.

For this reviewer, the most significant advantage the author has when she turns to this task is her capability to undertake research and interpret the results of that research, as demonstrated in her celebrated historical novels. This book is meticulously researched, covering the question whether animals are entitled to have rights, the cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries and their dependency on animal testing, the meat industry including questions of transportation, slaughtering norms and factory farming, the manufacture of apparel, the treatment of domestic pets, the exploitation of exotic animals including marine life, how to build an eco-friendly garden, the role of zoos in conservation, how sympathisers should protest issues and the coordination of international welfare standards. Newbery explores all these questions with her customary lucidity. No reader should feel reluctant to read this book on account of a lack of prior familiarity with the issues it raises.

A word of warning: some of the practices described in this book are brutal and will give qualms to any sensitive reader.

### **Rebecca Butler**

### **The Travelling Camera: Lewis Hine and the Fight to End Child Labor**

Alexandra S.D. Hinrichs, illus. Michael Garland, pub. Getty

Quite simply: stunning.

Stunning in so many ways. The production quality of the book itself, the narrative, the pictures, the photos, and the information provided, but in many ways, most importantly, the way in which it opens the eyes of most UK readers to the subject of child labour. As the spelling of this excellent book indicates, it is an American publication, and the subtitle 'Lewis Hine and the Fight to End Child Labor' refers to conditions of children in the United States. Nevertheless, it could as easily be illustrating the work that children as young as six were undertaking in the UK at the turn of the twentieth century, exactly the age of the middle grade readers for whom the book is intended. Not until 1933 in the UK, and 1938 in the US were laws introduced to prevent children under fourteen being full-time employed.

Where she can, Alexandra S.D. Hinrich's narrative includes the actual words written by Hines about his crusade to reveal the conditions in which children were being employed:

minute upon minute  
hour upon hour  
day upon day  
month after month.

Where she needs to, she adds her own brief text, based on Hines' general observations, description of the conditions in which children were working. Through Michael Garland's powerfully simple, muted illustrations we see children working in factories, in mines, in fields, and selling various things on the streets. The illustrations are almost like sepia photographs with a light amount of colouring – a common photographic technique at the time he is portraying. Hines often had difficulty trying to gain entry to the workplaces, as many employers were perfectly aware that conditions for the children were unpleasant and dangerous, and he developed a variety of personas whereby he could observe and photograph them.

These photographic images are quite grim, as the final ten 'Notes to the Reader' show, so in Garland's depiction of children, whilst never flinching from the dreadful conditions, he softens the images of the children to suit his young readers. Text and illustration meld wonderfully, offering an essential book for schools everywhere.

## **Bridget Carrington**

### **When Plants Took Over the Planet: The Amazing Story of Plant Evolution**

Dr Chris Thorogood, illus. Amy Grimes, pub. QED Publishing

*When Plants Took Over the Planet* documents a concise history of plants from the first water plants that have been estimated to have appeared around 500 million years ago, through their amazing journey onto land. There is also an excellent timeline of their evolution from the Palaeozoic era to the Cenozoic era.

Dr Chris Thorogood has put his reputation as a botanic field guide writer to good use to create a visually dynamic non-fiction picture book for young people that can be used as a means for identifying different plants and guide young readers through the key aspects of the life of plants, from early ferns which were most certainly munched on by dinosaurs, to carnivorous plants that snap and 'attack' their prey, or powerful medicinal plants that can heal ailments and boost health. It even includes how to pronounce the difficult looking Latin words. The snippets of bite-sized narrative weaves its way

through how the multitude of magnificent and mysterious variations evolved into the vast array of adaptations that populate our planet today. It provides examples of how they can be used in medicines, the animals, including humans that need them to survive and touches on the damage humans are doing to this fascinating resource.

Amy Grimes' illustrations are bright and bold vinaigrettes inspired by the colours of nature and the natural world. Any child will want to spend hours just pouring over the illustrations to determine the plants similarities and differences.

This large-format, highly illustrated book could be used to support topics taught at the top end of primary school in particular, living things and their habitats and evolution and inheritance. It will inspire budding young gardeners and botanists to discover more about the world of plants and maybe even go on to grow some truly bizarre and extraordinary plants for themselves.

### **Anita Loughrey**

Reviewer's Website: [www.anitaloughrey.com](http://www.anitaloughrey.com)

Anita Loughrey's next books are the last two books of *A Year in Nature* series *Squirrel's Autumn Puzzle* and *Fox's Winter Discovery* to be released Sept 21st 2021

### **The World's Most Pointless\* Wonderful Animals. \*Or Are They?**

Philip Bunting, pub. Happy Yak

With 80 brightly and boldly illustrated pages, this is a very nice sized book for young animal enthusiasts who want to discover and learn about some of the more unusual creatures that inhabit our planet. There are plenty of familiar animals, birds and insect too ... like the Daddy longlegs (or crane fly), the Pigeon and the Goldfish etc. but the accompanying facts make even these seem more interesting and unusual. Reassuringly for anyone that doesn't know, Daddy longlegs 'are not venomous, nor can they suck your blood.' The reader will also discover just what is they are good for. But in my mind it's the more unusual creatures that will grab the attention of young readers. The Aye-aye with its long finger, the Giraffe Weevil, or the Pink fairy armadillo etc.

Each of the creatures in the book is given a page, or double spread, of its own. As you'd expect, each page has a short informative paragraph giving some straightforward, yet interesting, factual details. Scattered around each picture are more, lighter and often humorous (though still factual) nuggets of information written in a more casual, handwritten style font, many of which are sure to make the readers smile.

I like the inclusion of each creature's Latin name which has been crossed out and humorously replaced. For example - Mayfly. Ephemeroptera. Hereus todayus gonus tomorris. Or the Elephant shrew whose Latin name has been substituted with Leapus trunkface elonmuskybutt (and whilst being funny, still has factual links).

The combination of bold illustrations, and the mixture of facts and humour make this a very attractive book and one that will certainly be of interest to boys or girls.

### **Damian Harvey**

## **Picture books**

### **At this Very Moment**

Matthew Hodson

### **Book Hospital**

Leigh Hodgkinson

### **The Day Fin Flooded the World**

Adam Stower

### **The Dragon Who Didn't Like Fire**

Gemma Merino

### **Escape: One Day We Had To Run**

Ming & Wah, illus. Carmen Vela

### **Finn's Garden Friends**

Rachel Lawton, illus. Lia Visirin

### **Grandad's Camper**

Harry Woodgate

### **Growing Pains**

Alison McLennan, illus. Melissa Johns

### **The King's Birthday Suit**

Peter Bentley, illus. Claire Powell

### **The Lion on the Bus**

Gareth P Jones, illus. Jeff Harter

### **Little Faces: Be Careful, Dragon!**

Carly Madden, illus. Hanako Clulow

### **Papa Penguin**

Lindsay Camp, illus. Momoke Abe

### **Rita's Rabbit**

Laura Mucha, illus. Hannah Peck

### **The Screen Thief**

Helen Docherty, illus. Thomas Doherty

### **The Wind in the Willows**

Kenneth Grahame, adapted by Timothy Knapman, illus. E.H. Shepard

## Junior books

### **Burning Sunlight**

Anthea Simmons

### **The Caravan at the Edge of Doom**

Jim Beckett, illus. Olia Muza

### **The Exploding Life of Scarlet Fife**

Maz Evans, illus. Chris Jevons

### **The Greatest Inventor**

Ben Brooks, illus. George Ermos

### **The House of Secret Treasure**

Kita Mitchell, illus. Isabelle Follath

### **How To Save The World with A Chicken and An Egg**

Emma Shevah, illus. Kirsti Beautyman

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Pippa Curnick

### **The Life and Time of Lonny Quicke**

Kirsty Applebaum

### **The Magical Bookshop**

Katje Frixe, illus. Florentine Prechtel, trans.  
Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp

### **Oddity**

Eli Brown, illus. Karin Rytter

### **The Outlaws Scarlett and Browne**

Jonathan Stroud

### **The Peculiar Tale of the Tentacle Boy**

Richard Pickard

### **Saint Ivy: Kind at All Costs**

Laurie Morrison

### **Sequins and Secrets**

Lucy Ivison, illus. Helen Crawford White

### **Something I Said**

Ben Bailey Smith

## **Young Adult books**

### **Boy in a White Room**

Karl Olsberg

### **Curses**

Lish McBride

### **Destination Anywhere**

Sara Barnard, illus. Christiane Fürtges

### **The Great Godden**

Meg Rosoff

### **Let's Go Swimming on Doomsday**

Natalie C. Anderson

### **The Lucky List**

Rachael Lippincott

### **Not My Problem**

Ciara Smyth

### **The Paper Girl of Paris**

Jordyn Taylor

### **Six Crimson Cranes**

Elizabeth Lim

### **Small Favors**

Erin A. Craig

### **The Summer We Turned Green**

William Sutcliffe

### **These Hollow Vows**

Lexi Ryan

### **Things To Do Before the End of the World**

Emily Barr

### **Tsunami Girl**

Julian Sedgwick and Chie Kutsuwada

### **You & Me at the End of the World**

Brianna Bourne

## **Non-Fiction books**

### **Allies: Real Talk About Showing Up, Screwing Up, And Trying Again**

Eds. Shakirah Bourne, Dana Alison

### **Clare Beaton's Make Your Own Castle**

Clare Beaton

### **The Dinosaur Awards**

Barbara Taylor, illus. Steve Collins

### **How to Be a Vet**

Dr Jess French, illus. Sol Linero

### **Little Brown Bear: It's OK to Make Mistakes**

Georgia AnnelieseDraws

### **Little Brown Bear: It's OK to Need a Friend**

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### **Masters of Disguise: Can you Spot the Camouflaged Creature?**

Marc Martin

### **Myths, Monsters and Mayhem in Ancient Greece**

James Davies

### **Out of the Blue: How Animals Evolved from Prehistoric Seas**

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### **The People's Painter: How Ben Shahn Fought for Justice with Art**

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### **That's Life!: Looking for the Living Things all around you**

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### **This Book Is Cruelty Free: Animals and Us**

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### **The Travelling Camera: Lewis Hine and the Fight to End Child Labor**

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### **When Plants Took Over the Planet: The Amazing Story of Plant Evolution**

Dr Chris Thorogood, illus. Amy Grimes

### **The World's Most Pointless\* Wonderful Animals. \*Or Are They?**

Philip Bunting