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Books Reviewed

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Picturebooks

All the Wonderful Ways to Read

Laura Baker, illus. Sandra de la Prada, pub. Little Tiger

This is a magical exploration of all the ways that we can enjoy reading. It takes us through a world full of adventure, imagination, colour, and excitement. As an adult I have been used to ideas such as *The Rights of the Reader* by Daniel Pennac, but there has not really been anything to explain the wonder of reading to the very youngest audiences.

This book leads us through the wide variety of ways that we can experience reading and we follow the main character as they go on a journey of discovery. The book uses a wide range of animals to express the different ways to read, such as 'gobbling a book', 'squeeze in a nook' or 'curl up for hours.' We also see that the books can be used for our well-being; either taking us on adventures or taking us to a calm and peaceful place. The rhyming text brings that sense of peace to the story and creates a lyrical quality that is very attractive to the reader. As with all picture books it is the illustrator who plays such a tremendous role in interpreting the text and adding those extra dimensions which really extend our understanding. The wonderful use of colour, movement and pace really adds to the magic of the book.

What really comes across very strongly is the way that reading can develop our imagination and allows any of us to be creative in whatever way suits us. This can be illustration, writing poetry, becoming an author, or like many of us, becoming a librarian, teacher, or publisher. Altogether this is a fantastic read to use with the very youngest audience and is worthy of being in the collections of every nursery and story time event.

Margaret Pemberton

Captain Looroll

Matt Carr, pub. Farshore

In this laugh-out loud adventure story, Captain Looroll is out to defeat the mighty ToileTROLL with Ray the Spray, Victoria Sponge and Barbara Bogbrush by her side. It's a pretty sticky situation they find themselves in, when they find something strange and slimy swirling around in the upstairs bathroom. That said, it's the perfect setting for a bit of mild bathroom-based peril, some superhero saving action and plenty of cheeky puns along the way.

Matt Carr, best-selling author of *Superbat*, *Spyder* and *Rhinocorn Rules*, delivers a fast-paced plot alongside his own action-packed illustrations, that at times is reminiscent of *Supertato* and friends in the series by Sue Hendra.

This book delivered much joy to both my three-year-old (for whom the simple mention of the title induced a titter) and my six-year-old who read it repeatedly aloud and enjoyed every play on words. And if you yourself love the chance to perfect storyteller sound effects, you'll want to volunteer to read this one to the group.

As Captain Loo-roll says herself – "come on team, grab this right away – there's no time to LOO-se!" (sorry!)

Amy Ellis

The Girl Who Loves Bugs

Lilly Murray, illus. Jenny Løvlie, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

I had the absolute pleasure of *trying* to read Lilly Murray and Jenny Løvlie's to a group of 4-year-olds who could not get enough of it... I think some of them missed the subtle rhymes, but the parents were laughing! This is testament to the joyous nature of the story, the detail of the illustration and the delight of every young child where bugs are involved.

We were reading it because we were about to go outside and create a garden, for bugs, by planting flowers to attract them all. The children were intrigued by all the different bugs in the pictures, delighting in the caterpillars, butterflies, and spiders particularly. I know that we will be coming back to this story more than once because none of my little listeners will tire of it. It is cleverly written to ensure the listener, or the reader can relate to Evie and her abundance of curiosity about the natural world. Then of course there are the hours of fun to be had simply by looking for and spotting all the different bugs on each of the pages.

PLUS, they can take inspiration from Evie and her Great Grandmother's wonderful solution for all the bugs that are accidentally let loose around the house. But I am getting ahead of myself, that is the end of the book! Inspired by the first female to run London Zoo's Insect House, Evie's story is one of a little girl who loves bugs so much she takes them into her home so she can see them all the time. The problem is that on the day Great Gran and the cousins come to visit the bugs escape...

Dawn Jones

Grandpa and the Kingfisher

Anna Wilson, illus. Sarah Massini, pub. Nosy Crow

Grandpas are special (and yours could have any number of different names depending on family traditions). The kingfisher is a beautiful bird we don't get to see enough. Bringing together this unusual and yet perfect pairing Anna Wilson's story is a life-affirming one of the power of nature that Sarah Massini has embraced in her outstanding illustrations.

The story encourages us to think positively about life, death and our part, our role in the natural world. It does all this with great kindness and sensitivity. The story also presents us with quite a lot of words for a picturebook, which makes it perfect for adults to share with very young readers and for the more confident to read for themselves. Given its subject matter this is particularly important.

Over the course of a single year one young child and their grandfather, along with the dog, spend their time watching the kingfishers by the river. They sit on their boat, and they look for the rush of feather, the flicker of blue lightening that tells them it is a kingfisher diving. Every time they see one it makes grandpa's eyes sparkle for this is his favourite bird. It was also the favourite bird of Anna Wilson's father, and the book is written in his memory. As we follow the humans and their dog through the year, we also follow the kingfisher family, fishing in the river, finding their mates, making their nest and we see that year after year on it goes. Nature goes on, hope is always out there we learn and our hearts fill with warmth.

May Marks

Molly, Olive, and Dexter

Catherine Rayner, pub. Walker Books

Greenaway Medal winner Catherine Rayner has been writing and illustrating for a long time now, and her distinctive way of drawing animals especially, has endeared her books to many readers.

Augustus and his Smile won the Booktrust Best New Illustrator Award in 2006, and she has a list of other awards. She won the Greenaway Medal for *Harris Finds his Feet* in 2009, and *Norris, the Bear Who Shared* was named one of the best 100 Children's Modern Classics by the Sunday Times.

In this, her latest picture book, Molly the hare, Olive the Owl and Dexter the fox are shown in wispy outlines and autumnal colours as they play hide and seek. The joke is that familiar idea of children hiding their eyes so that they can't see, but of course they can still be seen. Olive and Dexter are also not very good at hiding either the first or the second time, and Molly patiently explains that they must REALLY hide. Molly then has to look in lots of places, without success and she gets a bit worried. Of course, they had found a very good hiding place, and all is well.

This is a delightful book, which will be fun to read and share.

Diana Barnes

Much Too Busy

John Bond, pub. Harper Collins Children's Books

In this picture book, John Bond encourages us to take time to look around at the world around us. Pigeon, complete with bowler hat and briefcase, was rushing about, 'doing extremely busy business things', when he realised that he wasn't looking where he was going, (we see him at a signpost taking the Countryside path instead of Town or City) and found that he didn't know where he was at all. A 'Go-Slow' sign made him really cross, and so did Mouse, who was definitely not busy, but trying to decide what shape a cloud was...

Mouse offered to help, and led the way, but kept stopping to look at interesting things like a leaf that looks just the same shape as Pigeon's foot, and Pigeon kept on huffing that he's "much too busy for that." Mouse kept looking around him, while Pigeon thought of all the very important things he should be doing. When the sky grew dark, though, Mouse was no longer sure of the way, and wished he had been looking where they were going instead of looking around, and they were both lost. Pigeon stopped, heard birds cheeping and leaves rustling, and decided a rock looked rather like a cat: it was a wonderful forest! Finally, they saw the lights of the town and the way back, but Pigeon suggested sitting down for a bit and enjoying the forest, so they did, in spite of the phone ringing in Pigeon's briefcase.

John Bond is an experienced illustrator, having produced the *Mini Rabbit* books and some of the new *Mr Men* series, among others. In his characteristic style, he gives Pigeon various grumpy expressions, and Mouse never stops wondering, with wide eyes, at the world around him. This is a story told in bold colours, with a background (trees etc) that looks like collage, it will be fun to read and share.

Diana Barnes

My Mummy is a Witch

Helena Garcia, illus. Jess Rose, pub. Owlet Press

Helena Garcia was a competitor on *The Great British Bake-off* in 2019 and became known for her witchy and Halloween-inspired creations, so this picture book follows the theme of her enthusiasm. She has written books on witchcraft and is author of *The Wicked Baker*, but this is her first picture book. Experienced designer and illustrator Jess Rose imagines the characters and their surroundings in a muted retro-style which works well.

Mum dresses a little like Winnie the Witch, with her long stripey socks and short buckled boots, and her daughter feels very lucky. The witch can wake the sun, drive the clouds away, change the colour of the ocean, and make instant dandelion 'ice-scream' (the recipe, taking a bit longer, is provided at the back of the book.) Baths happen in a huge cauldron, with magic frogs making bubbles - it's all great fun. Sometimes mum goes off on her broomstick at night, leaving her daughter dreaming soundly in the care of their pet wolf.

There is some useful information on the endpapers e.g. the word 'witch' comes from the Anglo-Saxon 'wicca' meaning 'wise one', but of course the word has very different connotations now. Mum is evidently a good witch, but children may like to think of the special times they can have with their own mums, who may be clever in different ways.

Diana Barnes

One Hungry Dragon

Alastair Chisholm, illus. Alex Wilmore, pub. Hodder Children's Books

From the appearance of the dragon gracing the cover of Alastair Chisholm and Alex Wilmore's *One Hungry Dragon* we also have a dragon who loves his food, he is good though, there are remnants of fruit and veg – carrots and banana peel, even an apple, strewn alongside the big stack of doughnuts whilst we see him eating a delicious looking ice cream!

What a brilliant introduction to the story this is, it made us laugh and want to open up the book. But be warned for remember this is one hungry dragon and that must mean that he is after food, so go ahead, open up, but be prepared for this bold and funny, very, very funny picturebook.

Deep in a dark and gloomy forest there is a noise, a stomp, stomp, stomp which can mean only one thing, there is a big hungry dragon heading our way. But what is this he has spotted? Two little sheep, just right to be gobbled straight into a dragon's jaws. They are tasty but Bernardo, for this is the name of the big orange and red hungry dragon, is still hungry. Next he spots three heroes, determined to frighten him away so he melts their swords and gobbles them up. Foxes, bears, fairy godmothers (are you seeing a theme here?) Bernardo gobbles them all until it is time to sleep and his meals decide it is their turn...

Get ready to count as you follow the story, guess who will be eaten next and then discover if Bernardo can learn to have friends as well as an appetite!

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Shine Like the Stars

Anna Wilson, illus. Harry Woodgate, pub. Andersen Press

Shine Like the Stars is a poetic story of mindfulness and noticing the wonder of nature all around us. A gentle reminder of the connections we humans have with the world, this gorgeously illustrated picturebook explores how the everyday can act as a tonic in difficult times.

The narrator changes throughout, as we hear from personifications of celestial bodies and natural elements such as the sun, sky, and seeds. Through first person narrative, they describe both themselves and their healing powers if we just take time to slow down and notice them. From snowy grounds where the Northern Lights dance above to warm sandy lands where children skip barefoot in puddles, the illustrations take us on a journey across the world. This lovely detail prompts us of to consider our interconnectedness with each other and our shared sense of humanity as well as our bonds with nature.

The epilogue makes a departure from the lyrical narrative to give additional detail about nature's wonders. Combining scientific facts with ideas to promote mindfulness and emotional regulation, this section encourages the development of enquiring attitudes as well as providing inspiration to move beyond the pages of the book.

This beautiful book is an invitation for children to slow down, notice and soak up all that nature has to offer.

Pauline Bird

Some Do, Some Don't

Dipacho, pub. mineditionUS

The Jabiru is an unusual bird that does not often feature in stories and even less often is found in children's picturebooks because not very many people know much about it.

Here are some facts: it is the tallest flying bird in the Americas; it can be anything between four and five feet tall; it has a wingspan of nine feet. With a white body, black head, and red throat pouch it certainly stands out and the parents of any potential hatchlings take turns to look after the nest. The Jaribu birds are very family oriented but as with humans, some do, and some don't.

In Dipacho's *Some Do, Some Don't* picturebook we discover those things that unite us and those which make us different. Some of us have no family, others have lots of family, some like to be alone, others love company, some even like crowds whilst others prefer to be by themselves. Both near and

far some are fortunate enough to live together even if those they live with are very different from one another.

As we turn the pages of this simply told but incredibly evocative picturebook we quickly see that we are engaging in a profound exploration about what unites us and what makes us distinct as individuals. Sparsely worded this profound book allows readers to insert their own thoughts and feelings, discussing what each of the ideas and concepts mean for them, their idea of family.

Dawn Jones

The Spaces In Between

Jaspreet Kaur, illus. Manjit Thapp, pub. Big Picture Press

This charming picture book follows a young girl as she navigates the new world of a city. Whilst there are exciting things to see and hear, there are also experiences that can prove daunting and even scary. However, with the support of her father, she learns to explore this busy and bustling urban landscape and discover the positives as well as the more overwhelming negatives that surround her.

For many people, both young and old, it can be very disturbing to find yourself in a city landscape for the first time. The pace of life, noise and overpowering sense of height given by many buildings, is enough to prove frightening. This book provides gentle reminders that if we look for the positives it can help our wellbeing and sense of calm. The text is short and tells the story in rhyme, so that you feel the author is talking directly to the reader.

The fact that Jaspreet Kaur is an award-winning spoken work poet can be seen in this interaction that we feel, as well as the fact that you can imagine reading this out to younger readers. The illustrator has managed to convey the hustle and bustle of the city, whilst at the same time giving us glimpses into the much quieter and more relaxed events that are also taking place within buildings and public spaces. There is a very effective use of bright colours and changes in the scale of the scenes, but every now and then we return to the central character, and she takes central stage. Overall, this is a book that will be enjoyed by children and will provide a good talking point for adults to use in supporting young people with their wellbeing.

Margaret Pemberton

Standing On One Leg is Hard

Erika McGann, illus. Clive McFarland, pub. O'Brien Press

I review books about science and technology so when *Standing On One Leg is Hard* was suggested for review, I looked forward to a book exploring the physics and biology behind balance. I half thought that I might also receive an even more worthy book with motivational sentiments along the lines of ‘You can’t do it **YET!**’ because such books are flavour of the moment. How wrong I was! This book is light on worthiness and very heavy on charm and originality. I was utterly delighted!

Let me digress for a moment. Anyone familiar with small children will know that they see the world around us in a completely different way to adults and ask questions accordingly: If maps only show the important places, how do you know where ordinary places are? Why is my reflection upside down in a spoon? And so on. Small children have all the mental skills to be little philosophers and scientists.

All this leads me on to the book...finally! A heron chick wants to stand on one leg, she tries (I love that the chick is a ‘she’) but falls. She employs various potential (and hilarious solutions) which fail spectacularly, before hitting on the answer: the reader mustn’t look. And so, when the reader closes their eyes, she succeeds...but unwitnessed. It’s a simple story told using engaging dialogue and straightforward rhymes: direct and uncomplicated. It is also, of course, a very familiar situation.

How often have we all wailed ‘But I **COULD** do it perfectly’ to a new audience? Children will instantly recognise this scenario and revel in its depiction. I shall, in turn, very much enjoy reading the story to my youngest children at school. We can try some of the suggested solutions. Is it easier or harder to balance on one leg while looking up? Does wearing shoes facilitate good balance? (Science has been worked in after all!)

Praise should also go to the illustrator, Clive McFarland, who uses a charming mixed media technique to capture both the herons’ watery world and the humour of the story perfectly. All this brings me back to those little scientists and philosophers because buried in this story is the subtle idea that outcomes may differ on whether they are observed or not. Will those original, quirky and unbiased young minds absorb this important concept by osmosis? It’s an intriguing question but we will never know – just as we never know whether the chick succeeds. Neat!

Katherine Wilson

There’s No Such Thing as Dragons

Lucy Rowland, illus. Katy Halford, pub. Scholastic

This book is about a little boy whose grandpa told him that dragons aren’t real. The boy refuses to believe this and ventures around his house and outside to prove that they are real. They visit many places, like the dinosaur museum and a castle, they even ride on a hot air balloon ride so the boy can search for his favourite creature. After a busy day searching for a dragon, he finally gives up and

reluctantly admits that they must not be real, however, suddenly, there's one stood right there with its baby! He's so happy as he knew all along that they existed, and his grandpa was stunned!

This book is a fantastic read and really captures the imagination of a young child, especially when it comes to their favourite fantasy creatures! It showed how the passion of a child can really change the day from a normal day out with family, to one that full of magic and hope.

I especially enjoyed the fun activities that the family did together when they were out, such as visiting museums and the trip to a castle as I believe it's important for children to experience family bonding times like these and I'm certain its days like this that fuel their incredible imagination.

I thought the way that the book was written was smooth, concise, and catchy, with the rhymes having a very good range of vocabulary. The illustrations were really great, the illustrator is clearly very talented, and I feel like they helped me create a full visionary of the story and helped the magic of the story stand out.

All in all, I would rate this book highly and I would absolutely buy it for one of my nieces and nephews, I am certain they would all enjoy this book, and their ages range from 4 to 13! Great job, I am very impressed.

Izzy Bean

Junior Books

Annie Lumsden, the Girl From the Sea

David Almond, illus. Beatrice Alemagna, pub. Walker Books

Annie Lumsden is thirteen. She lives with her mother, a storyteller, shanty singer and artist, by the coast in the northeast of England. Both are happy in their beautiful surroundings and their warm, loving relationship. But Annie is not like other children. Letters and numbers are an inscrutable jumble for her. She is mocked and laughed at. Schooling becomes impossible. Sometimes she feels she is a creature of the sea, as much fish as human. She has frequent falls and following each one she enters a dreamlike underwater existence in which she feels comfortable and safe. Doctors cannot explain what is wrong.

One day she asks her mother to tell her the truth about her father. As she hears about a man with webbed feet and a fin on his back who emerged from the waves, a photo is taken. That photo tells its own story. Gradually life begins to make sense in a new way. 'Afterwards things were never quite the same. Things that'd seemed fixed and hard and hopeless started to shift. Words stopped being barnacles. Numbers were no longer limpets. I started to feel as free on land as I did in the sea. I fell less and less.'

A haunting short story about coming of age, identity, difference and belonging. David Almond blends reality and magic in his inimitable, lyrical way. Like *Skellig*, this has a poetic, myth-like feel, a feel that is heightened by the wonderful, watery illustrations by award-winner Beatrice Alemagna that adorn every page. Recommended (though check it is not already in stock in your school or library, as this is a reissue).

Anne Harding

Bella Beetroot

Martin Auer, illus. Axel Scheffler, pub. Scholastic

When Bella Beetroot is asked to do anything she doesn't want to she holds her breath and goes on until she goes bright red in the face - as red as a beetroot! Until... one day, right in the middle of a tantrum, a mighty eagle flies down and swoops her away, on an incredible adventure. Bella defeats dragons, doesn't marry a prince (no, thank you!), and is still home in time for tea.

As adults we all know children, who when they are not getting their own way, will hold their breath and turn a lovely shade of red. It's amazing how long a child can actually do this for. But as children get older, they learn that they will never get their own way by doing this and they will outgrow the

habit. This is exactly what happens in this story. Bella soon learns that this behaviour, her tantrums, won't work. Bella's is a thoroughly modern tale with an interesting girl as its lead, who certainly isn't a typical girl/princess character. Here is a character who knows her own mind, knows what she wants.

This book is ideal for newly independent readers who have left picturebooks behind and are now wanting to read slightly longer books with a more in-depth story with short chapters and plenty of illustrations. Bella Beetroot is a story that's easy to follow with a font slightly larger than normal to help children develop their independent reading. Each page has a beautifully coloured picture accompanying the story on which note – the illustrations are simply beautiful. They have been drawn by award winning illustrator Axel Scheffler whose style will be familiar to many readers.

A fabulous book, great story, lovely illustrations, one that I highly recommend for children starting out on their journey to independent reading.

Helen Byles

The Boy Who Saved a Bear

Nizrana Farook, pub. Orion Children's Books

A book that features books, lots of them, stories, a Great Library, plenty of adventure, one young boy and a very big bear makes for a fantastic mix especially when almost all these ingredients feature in the first few pages.

If this is your first introduction to a story told by Nizrana Farook then you are in for a treat. Set in her home county of Sri Lanka the sweeping landscapes that she describes certainly make me wish I was there, the adventures that she sends her characters on too. Not only does it make me, and I am sure you want to be there, but it also gives her the opportunity to share more about the wonders of the setting and encourage all our imaginations to wander just a little farther than they might usually.

Nuwan is a dreamer, but his dreams have always been of adventure for this is what he craves. When he finds himself hiding in the cave of a bear this seems exciting, but it is only the start. If, and this does seem like a big if to him, he gets out of the cave alive then his task is to take the stolen key of Nissanka on a journey all the way to the King's City. This is going to be a very big adventure, quite literally the adventure of a lifetime but Nuwan is not going to be on his own for he is going to persuade the ferocious bear Karadi, to go with him on his journey. Now he has two challenges, he must get to the city in time, and he must also save the bear from jungle dangers.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Dandy the Highway Lion

Stephanie Sorrell, illus. Roxana de Rond, pub. Chicken House Books

So here for Spring, I was given this lovely sunny tale, just like its warm earthy cover donning the leads; two kids and a Lion meeting at a public park - sounds weird but here it is. After being ousted from their home and coming to London, Ben and Hattie Davenport meet Mr Dandy Paws. This is no ordinary lion from the jungle but one with riches and a kind motive.

Mr Dandy Paws is the first 'Highway Lion'- one of a kind, not only as a character in the story but in his import as well - reminding one of the likes of Robin Hood, or a combination of the Mad Hatter and The Cheshire Cat from the *Looking Glass* series by Lewis Carroll. Dandy Lion makes witty eye-opening remarks in his Victorian English mannerisms which will delight the reader immensely with one example being: "it takes time to adjust to freedom."

The story loops the reader into the adventures of Ben, Hattie and Mr Dandy the lion in hilarious, humorous ways. It makes one want to ask questions, it sparks the imagination and helps children learn through learning about history, society, human values, and environmental awareness. Dandy doesn't just help the children, he fights for the rights of the animals too: "living creatures are held prisoner in every corner of the land," said Dandy, as if he were a general making a speech to his troops, his Mane standing on end. "And we are here to free them."

The soft reflective illustrations by Roxana de Rond coupled with Stephanie Sorrell's smooth flow make this book a great bedtime read for younger children. I definitely recommend picking this one up to take a journey with Mr Dandy Paws and his friends.

Ishika Tiwari

The Double Trouble Society

Carrie Hope Fletcher, illus. Davide Ortu, pub. Puffin

Maggie and Ivy are best friends. They live in the mysterious village of Crowood Peak which has a legend. Three hundred years ago, the witch of Crowood Peak, who had been a good witch, made a deal with a demon and turned deadly evil. In order to break the curse, she has to eat the hearts of thirteen children. Twelve have died prior to the start of the novel and the Crowood Witch has been banished. However, if the legend is true, she will return this year at the festival held by the village to celebrate her banishment – to claim the thirteenth child.

Is the legend true and can Maggie and Ivy stop it? They are the Double Trouble Society, and they are going to follow the evidence pointing them to the old mansion next door with its suspiciously witchy-looking new owner.

The major strength of this novel is its portrayal of relationships and emotions particularly in Maggie and Ivy's almost sisterly bond. Relationships are also extremely important in the denouement of the book. A further strength is the way the novel plays with memory and identity. Many middle-grade aged children will enjoy this fast-paced fantasy with relationships at its heart.

Rebecca Butler

The Gold Medal Mysteries: Thief on the Track

Ellie Robinson, illus. James Lancett, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books

Ellie Robinson is a multi-medal winning British swimmer and Paralympian, and this is her debut children's book. Her experience of competing at major international events is evident in the way she incorporates plenty of behind-the-scenes details in this exciting mystery adventure, bringing the atmosphere of the Olympic Park and the Games to life for the reader.

Having travelled to Tokyo to attend the Games with her father, sports-mad Hannah is looking forward to enjoying the events in the stadium, watching her favourite athletes compete and cheering them on. She quickly becomes friendly with two other young fans, Maria and Seb, sharing their enthusiasm for all the athletes they are watching. When the gold medal won by popular American sprinter Jesse Marks goes missing, they are determined to track it down. With numerous suspects to consider they have to use all their detective skills to find the clues and unmask the thief.

Fast paced, literally in some places, as the friends race around the Sportpark, from the media centre to the Athletes' village and back again, this will appeal to readers of 9+ who will be able to see themselves in the characters and imagine they too could be the ones solving the mystery of the theft.

With their friendship cemented, I'm sure this trio will be back in action soon, solving more sporting mysteries.

Jayne Gould

The Great Fox Heist

Justyn Edwards, illus. Flavia Sorrentino, pub. Walker Books

The Great Fox Heist is the second book in the *Great Fox* series. This fast-paced mystery adventure is full of magical misdirection and distraction. Flick Lions and her friend Charlie are in Switzerland to take part in another competition to steal a priceless diamond necklace from one of the most secure bank vaults in the world. This is happening alongside Flick still searching for answers about her

father's mysterious disappearance, never knowing who she can trust. Flick is a strong, dynamic character who the reader can easily identify with.

The Great Fox promises several times that at the next stop her father will be there, but he never materialises. Even by the end of the book she has not yet discovered where her father is. But the reader does have a greater understanding of why The Bell system should remain a secret.

Just like the first in the series, *The Great Fox Heist*, is cleverly written with a well-crafted plot that builds up the tension as Flick searches for answers. The heist is well thought out and believable. Flick's prosthetic leg is shown through her cautious way of climbing but is never seen as a hindrance and does not restrict her achieving her goal.

There have been a lot of crime style mystery books for middle grade recently, but *The Great Fox Heist* is unique as it is from the thief's point of view. Unlike other books in this genre it invites the reader to solve how the heist was done and send the author a message with the promise of being able to help with the next assignment. What a fantastic incentive to get readers to invest in the characters and the series. I know I'm looking forward to reading the next book.

Anita Loughrey

Honey's Hive

Mo O'Hara, illus. Aya Kakeda, pub. Andersen Press

Honey is a young bee buzzing with ambition, who can't find her role in her small hive. She's not suited to being a larva nurse, mainly due to her daydreaming. Honey Bee you see has a tendency to daydream and a habit of being dramatic. An example of her daydreaming is when she's supposed to be studying hive history ... her mind wanders to imagining herself as the queen of an ancient Egyptian beehive!

All is not lost however, and Honey thinks she's found her place in the hive when she's assigned to look after the Queen Bee, no less. But just as she thinks she's found a job she likes a swarm threatens the whole hive! Honey makes her escape and discovers a rooftop paradise at the top of a tower block – the perfect place to set up a new hive. Fighting off a swarm of angry wasps, and working together with her friends, Honey saves the day and builds a new home for her and her community! With this adventure Honey discovers her true calling as a scout bee and there is a cheering conclusion that will leave 7+-year-olds un-bee-lievably eager to waggle dance into her next adventure!

This book is the start of a charming new series that will be very popular. It is perfect for newly independent readers who are progressing on to chapter books, the font is a little larger than standard middle grade books, and there is a picture on every page.

This is a story all about being who you want to be, having ambition and friendship. A must-read for animal lovers who, while reading this book, have the opportunity to learn all about bees and the environment. A great story full of facts and ideas for helping the bee population.

Helen Byles

Ivy Newt and the Storm Witch

Derek Keilty, illus. Madga Brol, pub. Scallywag Press

Ivy Newt and the Storm Witch is a magical, illustrated adventure that is sure to be an enjoyable book for people who love simple but exciting illustrated fantasy books. This is the first adventure in the *Ivy Newt* books, featuring Ivy Newt, the Sand Witch, and her friends. It is a great introduction to Miracula, a magical world ruled by thoughtful and caring Kings and Queens and introduces the interesting characters who live there. Also featured in the book is an illustrated map of Miracula, a gallery showing the characters featured in the story, and fun drawings on every page! There is a second *Ivy Newt* book due to be released later this year, so anyone who enjoyed Ivy's first adventure and is interested in reading another book about her can find out what happens next to Ivy and her friends.

On Ivy Newt's birthday there is a big, unexpected storm, but her parents King Lucius and Queen Fenella of the Sand Witches are still determined to give their daughter a brilliant birthday, even if her friends can't be with her. The King and Queen show Ivy an exciting magic trick where they disappear. And it works – but they really do disappear, and Ivy is convinced that they won't make it back without help. Ivy and her two friends – Tom, who can shapeshift from a boy into a wolf, and Felix, a new friend who is a Carpet Wizard – must go on a daring quest to find Ivy's parents and bring them back. They must also stop the evil Queen from putting her wicked plot into action.

This book features an adventure about loyalty, family, and friendship. Ivy, Tom, and Felix face many challenges on their quest that they overcome using their intelligence, bravery, determination, skill, and friendship. This book, full of illustrations, is perfect for young readers aged about 5-8 years old.

Mya Grant (aged 10)

Leeva At Last

Sara Pennypacker, illus. Matthew Crodell, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books

This is a charming story about a girl finding her voice. Leeva's parents are monstrous – greedy and vacuous and totally neglectful of their wonderfully kind and bright daughter. Trapped and isolated in

her home, and forced to carry out domestic chores, Leeva is desperate to go to school so that she can be part of a community. When her parents refuse, Leeva has the courage to search for this on her own. And as all great things do, her journey starts at the library, where she befriends Harry and his aunt Mrs Flowers.

Leeva loves reading and language and tries to learn a word a day from the local newspaper. She is on a quest to discover ‘what people are for’ since her insufferable parents insist that they have no point unless they can make you richer or more famous. The narrative is propelled by Leeva’s growing friendships as she goes about town tracking down ingredients for cookies. Our favourite was a baby badger called Bob who loves to dig and sleep, and eventually purr.

At the beginning of the novel, Leeva discovers that ‘Learning that you cannot trust the people you’ve relied on is devastating’ and must right the wrongs of her universally despised parents in the town. Funny in places, moving and heart-warming in others, this book would be a welcome addition to any bookshelf.

We really loved the black and white illustrations which appear on every few pages, and really convey the personalities of the different characters. We appreciated the fifty-four short chapters, as sometimes at bedtime you just don’t want to plough through long ones.

I read this to our seven-year-old son who enjoyed it. This is a wonderful novel to share with your children because many of the themes provoke further discussion. But equally, a lovely book for a child to read on their own, I would recommend for ages 8-12.

Stephanie Robertson

Lost on Gibbon Island

Jess Butterworth, pub. Orion Children’s Books

Twelve-year-old Lark’s mother is an environmental journalist, who has been asked to travel to Cambodia to report on the disappearance of gibbons from the country’s rainforest. When her mother tells her that the whole family is going with her, Lark is not best pleased; she’s happy at school and doesn’t want the disruption.

When the family arrives, Lark’s discontent indirectly leads to her being shipwrecked on an uninhabited island – with a small gibbon whom she calls Goldie. She and Goldie support each other in finding ways to survive on the island – which is no easy task. She has almost nothing except her notebook and a pen, with which she proceeds to keep a journal.

The story of how the two of them manage is gripping. There are no obvious sources of food or water, and there is danger from snakes, stinging sandflies, and fearsome jellyfish. But Goldie shows Lark where to find fruit, and she scavenges the beach for useful finds like plastic bottles and spare pens. She proves to be very resourceful indeed – even when she comes up against the ruthless wildlife smugglers who are determined to stop Lark’s mother from interfering with their ugly trade.

Jess Butterworth relates at the end of the book how she herself was stuck on an island off Cambodia for two weeks. Unlike Lark, she had ‘food, water, shelter and company’, but all the same, the book is clearly based on her experiences, and this grounding in reality is what makes the experience recounted in the book convincing and fascinating. It’s a gripping adventure story, with care for the environment and for our planet’s vulnerable wildlife at its core – and a resourceful young heroine with whom readers will be able to identify.

Sue Purkiss

Sue Purkiss’s *Jack Fortune and the Search for the Hidden Valley* is published by Alma Books.

My Especially Weird Week with Tess

Anna Woltz, trans. David Colner, pub. Oneworld

Sam’s family holiday on the island of Texel has just started when his brother Jasper suffers an accident. At the local surgery Sam meets Tess, a dynamic 12-year-old girl who lives on the island with her mother. Their friendship is immediate, and Sam is soon involved in Tess’s world, from organising a pet funeral to setting up a holiday for Tess’s estranged father. All the while Sam is mulling over deep existential matters and, in particular, questions about mortality, loss and bereavement. Tess, meanwhile, having found in an old album belonging to her mother and a clue to her father’s identity, has gone to great lengths to meet him and to keep her scheme hidden from her mother.

In the background Jasper too is dealing with his own personal crisis: an academic exam did not yield the hoped result, precluding his access to his school of choice.

These meaningful topics are dealt with sensitivity and a light touch. Woltz injects humour at the right moment, allowing these themes to develop within the story without it becoming morbid. Sam’s voice, as the narrator, is honest and extremely relatable; strong, resourceful yet sensitive Tess is an equally delightful character. Their interplay is beautifully crafted. The end of the story is upbeat, reassuring, full of hope and neat – arguably unrealistic from an adult perspective, but perfect for the relatively young readers. Due to the complexity of some of its subjects, this book would be better appreciated and enjoyed by children in lower secondary stage of education and above as an independent read. It would equally be a great tool for class discussions, offering a lot of food for thought.

Author Anna Woltz packs a lot of important themes in her relatively short story *My Especially Weird Week with Tess*. Translated from the original Dutch version by David Colmer, this book would be a fantastic addition to any secondary library.

Laura Brill

Nic Blake and the Remarkables: The Manifestor Prophecy

Angie Thomas, pub. Walker Books

Nichole Blake and her father are Remarkables, and more than that, they are Manifestors the most powerful of Remarkables, who can produce fire from their hands, move objects and create illusions.

On her 12th birthday, Nic is hoping that her father will finally teach her how to use The Gift so that she can be a real Manifestor and begin to explore her powers, as whilst all Manifestors are born with the gift inside of them, they must still learn how to use it. However, her father feels she's still not ready for the power of The Gift and insists she waits another year. Instead, he gives her a hellhound which to the Unremarkables they live amongst looks just like a cute puppy. Nic's birthday gets worse when a chance meeting causes her to have a vision which unnerves her father and consequently, he bans her from attending a book signing of her favourite author TJ Retro. Determined not to miss out Nic, along with her best friend the Unremarkable JP, sneak out to attend anyway. What she finds out while there, makes Nic question everything she thought she knew about her family and her heritage.

This story begins with a great deal of exposition about the Remarkables and their secret and fantastical world. As such I found the first chapter quite long and that it contained more information than story. I imagine for some children this could be a little off putting as I wasn't immediately hooked. However, at the very end of the chapter something occurred that had me suddenly turning pages in haste! The central characters of the story are Black, and the fast-paced story is cleverly interwoven with cultural references that readers may or may not be aware of such as, slavery, Black history, and George Floyd. The Manifestor mythology itself is based on African American Folklore and Biblical references.

In *Nic Blake and the Remarkables*, Angie Thomas has cleverly created colourful characters and a wondrous world which we have only just begun to get to know. I have no doubt there will be more adventures to come.

Tracey Corner

Wider Than the Sea

Serena Molloy, illus. George Ermos, pub. Hodder Children's Books

Ró is struggling. Struggling with school, struggling with her parent's difficult relationship, struggling with friendships, and struggling to hide her dyslexia too. On the cusp of puberty, everything feels as if it is changing and Ró desperately wants to freeze things in time before things change for the worse. Her connection with the dolphin that lives in the bay and her love of art are the only stable things she has. Then Sunny, the dolphin, disappears and Ró sees this as another unwanted change, another part of her life out of control.

As a busy mum of three, and a teacher, finding time to read can be a struggle. I have to squish my love of reading between work, school runs, music and dancing lessons and often, despite wanting desperately to read on, I have to put a book aside to get back to what needs to be done. Then I received *Wider Than the Sea*, and I can't remember the last time that I really, REALLY couldn't put a book down. Accompanied by delightful illustrations by George Ermos, the text, with its wonderful words and ingenious design, dances across the pages as Ró tells her story, and I found myself carried away as if by the waves on a most powerful and enlightening journey.

This insightful tale of a girl who feels broken is a powerful reminder of individual struggles and how important it is to recognise these. I was shocked and surprised at how deeply it affected me and for the first time (despite my years of teaching experience) I stepped inside the shoes of a child with dyslexia and saw the world through her eyes in no uncertain terms. I know that the impact of this book will be lasting.

Serena Molloy has so cleverly taken her own experiences as a child struggling with dyslexia and carefully, magically, and heart-warmingly wrapped them in the most exquisite and beautiful tale. Suitable for readers aged nine and above, I simply cannot recommend this book highly enough, and for those of us who teach, it's an absolute must!

Tracey Corner

Young Adult Books

Boy Like Me

Simon James Green, pub. Scholastic

This is a story of forbidden love between two teenage boys. It is told in a sympathetic, loving way and very honest way. It is set in 1994, with references to the Section 28 rule, when talk of gay relationships in schools was forbidden.

Single-sex relationships in young adult fiction are still a sensitive subject. In this book there are scenes of homophobic abuse and violence. Jamie, one of the main characters, is struggling to come to terms with his feelings towards other boys. He is helped to overcome his fears and worries by boyfriend Rob, whose father is the local M.P. Readers will feel sad and hopeful throughout the book, as Jamie gradually increases in confidence and comes to terms with how he is feeling. Some adults in the book are very understanding and supportive, whilst others are very hostile and aggressive towards the two boys.

The story shows how Jamie, in particular, learns how to accept his feelings for Rob. He is finding it very difficult to admit to being gay. He writes anonymously in the pages of a disguised book in the school library and receives help and support from the school librarian. The story is not all doom and gloom. There is a lot of genuine love, kindness, and goodness throughout the book.

There are many interesting and fascinating references to 1990's Britain throughout the story and there are some very helpful footnotes and explanations in every chapter. Despite covering a tough topic, this is a very good and enjoyable read. It is sad and painful and yet also fun and reassuring.

Gary Kenworthy

Chaos & Flame

Tessa Gratton, Justina Ireland, pub. Penguin Random House Children's Books

Setting the scene for what certainly promises to be an edge-of-your-seat trilogy this book has it all. Enemies, loves, battles, fantastical creatures, and a morally grey villain. It leaves us on a cliff-hanger but more on that later. First what is the story and why is it so good?

It is a dual narrative told from the points of view of two primary characters – Talon and Darling. Talon Goldhoard is of House Dragon, Darling Seabreak is a foundling, quite literally found in the gutter, and adopted into House Kraken. Darling's family were murdered by the forces of Talon's

father, and she has no love for his house. No matter, for his brother, (the possibly mad) Caspian, is determined to set things right, to end the war, broker peace between all the Houses and restore Darling to her rightful place as Scion of House Sphinx despite her being the lone survivor. Talon is a soldier for House Dragon, Darling has been trained as an assassin and Caspian is prince, Scion, of House Dragon.

Assassin, soldier, and prince lead the action despite no-one knowing what the rules are and Caspian seemingly making them up as he goes along. This is the world of *Chaos & Flame*, a world where a deadly game of power is the master playing piece and where you have to watch your back at every moment. Each player knows what they are capable of, what they would rather be doing but are thrust into this potentially deadly game.

It gets stranger by the moment. Caspian has been painting Darling as an eyeless girl obsessively for years – she is a girl he may or may not be in love with. His brother is very definitely slowly falling for her, but it seems destiny has different plans for all of them none of which we truly discover until the final pages, leaving us on an enormous cliff-hanger and very ready for book 2!

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Crossing the Line

Tia Fisher, pub. Hot Key Books

Erik's world is swiftly falling apart at a speed that he can't handle. The dominoes are toppling faster than he can pick them up and time is running out. This isn't your regular YA story of adolescent woes and relationship crises; Erik has grown up problems and little in the way of an adult he can rely on. Following the aftermath of the first wave of Covid-19, we meet Erik while he is still struggling to come to terms with the death of his dad - a man taken too soon, by the deadly virus. Things get progressively worse when his mum gives birth to twins, and Erik finds himself supporting both his grieving mother and his crying siblings.

With the mounting pressure of school, grades, family, and money Erik just wants to run. Then an opportunity presents itself, a chance to help his family and turn their fortunes around. But, as is so often the way, when something sounds too good to be true it normally means that it is.

The true hero of this book is Ravi, Erik's best friend, and the sort of person we would all want on our side in good times and bad. I loved the way that Ravi, despite being a supporting character, really developed throughout the book. He really came out of his shell as the narrative progressed, pushing himself to be a better person, taking risks, and doing everything possible to help support a friend in need.

So many of the cautionary tales given to children feel like lectures, like messages from people who know better than you, and often contain very little information other than ‘this is bad,’ ‘don’t do this,’ and ‘you’ll understand when you’re older.’ Fisher’s novel is a world away from such messages, as she weaves her words of warning into a tale of lived human experience. Despite the hard-hitting topics of the book, it still remains playful and uses creative formatting to help elevate the narrative. Words are set into swirls and boxes, all the time helping to add to the story rather than distract from it.

The main message of this book is that you are never truly alone, that there is always somehow can help, so don’t ever be afraid to speak up if you find yourself in difficult times.

Rosie Cammish Jones

The First Move

Jenny Ireland, pub. Penguin Random House Children’s Books

I love a good debut novel and I can honestly, hand on heart, say that Jenny Ireland’s *The First Move* is more than good, it is an outstanding book.

A YA novel that combines, chess, romance, and arthritis doesn’t sound great if you describe it in three words but if you chose them differently and said Juliet meets Ronan maybe it would be perceived differently. And that, in fact, is part of the point of this book, to break down barriers, to wash away pre-conceptions and to hand teens an uplifting page-turning read. I will be sharing this book with as many people as will listen AND I will be reading it again. It is so beautifully written, it feels as though it has come directly from Jenny Ireland’s heart, it is also powerful, it brought me to the verge of tears at times. Interwoven with this is a fascinating learning experience, the novel is gently informative about both arthritis and the game of chess.

Juliet was diagnosed with childhood arthritis when she was just 12 years old and now every day is a challenge. Going into school with crutches, knowing that everyone is talking about her, medical appointments all the time, it could be impossible but Juliet refuses to give up. She is even more determined after she sets eyes on the new boy at school, Ronan. He is a curiosity, after all why does someone join a new school for their last year? Why won’t he speak to anyone and has he really just fallen straight in with the bad crowd?

Whilst all this is going on for Juliet her best friend Michael is desperately trying to arrange his own love life and do everything possible to help and support her. Despite everything, and this we are told as the story opens, Juliet is convinced real life is nothing like the movies. The question is will she change her mind after new life experiences bring a new perspective? Will the discovery of online chess with a very cute guy who she can chat to for hours and who she imagines she will never meet change her mind? Can she develop these moments of happiness and freedom into something more?

Juliet is a “good” girl. She doesn’t skip school or party like her peers, but can she change? She is the anthesis of the bad crowd who sit in the park drinking vodka but whilst she doesn’t want to be them can she find herself? Can she accept who she is, accept the support of her friends, learn to play chess, and learn to fall in love with the bad boy? Jenny Ireland poses some challenges for her characters, she has made the story feel real, relatable and perfect for its intended audience.

The First Move is an absolutely beautiful, heart-warming book that I simply did not want to, and could not put down until the very last line.

May Marks

Good For Nothing

Mariam Ansar, pub. Penguin Random House Children’s Books

Hooray! Mariam Ansar’s debut YA novel is unashamedly political. On the back cover of the uncorrected book proof and presumably also on the final copy, is a letter to the reader, which starts with Ansar’s summary of the upper and middle England view of northern towns. ‘These towns may be absent from the political priorities of our current government’ she writes, ‘They may be forgotten in a cultural landscape that emphasizes the speed and affluence of southern towns and cities. But northern towns... are not forgotten by those who grow up in them.’

In this novel Ansar sets out to show that ‘northern towns... with South Asian shopkeepers, Black barbers and young people desperate for something to do are important.’

This is the story of Eman, Amir and Kemi, three teenagers from the same class in their school, but who barely know each other, and who have families with different cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, when they get caught by the police writing graffiti on one of the town’s bus shelters they are forced to join a ‘volunteering’ group of young offenders spending their spare time undertaking smelly, boring and often useless community activities. The three parts of the novel show their progression from ‘Strangers’ to ‘Familiar Faces’ to ‘Friends’, and eventually prove the true circumstances of Amir’s older brother’s death.

The glossary of Pakistani/Arabic/Islamic words used proves very useful. Those living in the southern part of the town, an area of poverty, are ignored socially and automatically considered criminals by the largely white, affluent inhabitants of the area north of the river. As the book progresses Ansar reveals that, in reality, those who live in the impoverished area, and whatever their ethnic background or religion, at heart have far more compassion and thoughtfulness than the town’s ‘elite’.

Ansar writes from experience, as a Muslim secondary school teacher in a northern town, and her understanding of teenagers and experience of negative stereotyping comes from the heart. In the last chapter she leaves readers with an unresolved question which affects Eman's family. Will she resolve it with a second novel? I hope so...

Bridget Carrington

HappyHead

Josh Silver, pub. Rock The Boat

In the LGBTQ novel *HappyHead*, Seb has been hand-picked for a project designed to tackle unhappiness amongst teenagers. As a successful candidate, he must complete a set of tasks which become increasingly unsettling throughout the programme. Throughout the story Seb therefore wonders whether the project leaders and their seemingly good intentions are a façade for more sinister plans. Whilst at HappyHead Seb finds himself drawn to Finn, another successful candidate. However, he soon starts to feel at odds with himself, and questions both his place on the project, and how he feels about Finn. Seb wants to prove himself and make his family proud, yet he is also attracted to Finn - a person who continuously rebels against the system.

As the novel is written in the first person the story feels immersive, everything is told through Seb's eyes. Thus, readers will empathise with his foreboding sense of trepidation as each task is more disturbing than the last. Also, private moments between Seb and Finn make for lovely reading.

For his debut novel *HappyHead*, author Josh Silver was inspired by his work as a mental health nurse and explores the topics of sexuality and mental health. He also draws attention to how the very notion of happiness is "prescribed to us" via, for example, social media. It is why the successful candidates in the novel are told in their confirmation letter that "access to devices and the internet will be prohibited until departure" - for complete immersion in the project. But with *HappyHead*, Silver also delves into the human psyche, and the therapeutic systems that can be used to treat patients. In a short Q&A section at the rear of the book, he posits: "could these systems manipulate us and get people to do pretty much anything with the promise of a reward? The reward of happiness?" With the fictional HappyHead project in the novel, Silver is therefore drawing inspiration from the questions raised by real life treatments.

Although some scenes will not be suitable for everyone, *HappyHead* is an immersive, near-dystopian, novel that is difficult to put down. While there is a cliff-hanger ending, *HappyHead* is also the first novel in a planned series and is now set to be made into a feature film by Taron Egerton - so fans will not have long to find out what happens next!

Chris J Kenworthy

Let's Play Murder

Kesia Lupo, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Who could ask for more than computer games, mystery, and murder in a YA book? In *Let's Play Murder* Kesia Lupo offers readers all this, but it is skilfully placed within many much deeper insights into teenage angst and specific anxiety.

Seventeen-year-old Veronica has grown up in a family with multiple problems which have led to a less-than-ideal stepmother and a father who distances himself from his children. We learn that Veronica herself has hearing loss and poor eyesight, both of which have contributed to her shy behaviour and introversion. Her family also has a hereditary medical problem, which has already resulted in deaths, and her younger stepbrother, Max, is now so ill that he would need an extremely costly medical intervention which might or might not cure him.

We meet Veronica when she has just discovered that Max will almost certainly die. While visiting Max she suddenly finds herself in a snowy landscape with a large and mysterious house, and four other teenagers (two girls, two boys) whose lives are as complex and troubling as Veronica's. Somehow they have all entered VR – virtual reality – but the game they are about to begin is not a modern one, and hardly virtual. Instead, this game, and the entire house and time in which it exists, is set in the 1980s, complete with the shortcomings that any twenty-first-century player would face if playing computer games from so long ago. This of course results in enormous frustration and anger, which adds to the growing suspicion which each of the players has about the others. The game is filled with increasingly ghastly, wicked, disgusting, revolting, murderous (readers can add as many words as they can think of to describe the book's horror!) occupants of the house, not to mention ghosts and ghoulies, who inhabit every floor of the house. Blood flows liberally, and detached limbs loiter.

Beneath this horror however readers will recognise a multitude of worries and fears very familiar to teenagers. As a final jolt Lupo's novel ends with a surprise we certainly didn't anticipate. Surely a sequel is on its way – please!

Bridget Carrington

The Memory Eater

Rebecca Mahony, pub. Razorbill

Have you heard people say that that have just read a book like no other? I am going to say it now. I promise I don't say it very often for it is not often the case that a book genuinely stands out as being totally different. Rebecca Mahoney's *The Memory Eater* is. It is quite honestly a book like no other

and although its front cover tagline tells me that “forgetting comes at a price” I don’t think I will be forgetting for a very long time. The book is creepy, mysteriously so, even with some revelations made early on it is still impossible to know exactly what is going on and how it will unfold until you have read the whole. It’s compelling, unsettling, and atmospheric.

The Memory Eater is a book that offers possibilities, but it is also a book for forgetting those possibilities, for this is a story about having the opportunity to have your bad memories, those you would rather lay in the land of the forgotten, taken away from you.

Alana may only be seventeen, but she is responsible for making sure the family business, the one that keeps the memory eater sated, continues to thrive. There is a problem though. Some of her own memories have been taken and with them was the one about how to keep the monster contained. With the memory eater on the loose Whistler Beach could lose everything and as Alana delves deeper into the history of her family, their magical abilities, and the town, she discovers a shocking secret.

Part horror, part psychological thriller this book stands out from anything I have read in a long time. It sparked my curiosity even when I thought the answers had been revealed in the middle of the book – they hadn’t. This was only a small taster of the truth behind all the stories being woven, and taken away, by the Memory Eater.

Perhaps ironically, given its subject matter, this was an unforgettable story.

Colin Paterson

My Love Life and the Apocalypse

Melissa Welliver, pub. Chicken House

Earth is empty of human life: after a sudden freeze, evacuating the remaining human population seemed to be the only way to allow the planet to recover. Cities are home to weeds, trees, and a wide array of bots - restoration bots, cleaning bots, medibots and even a robocop. These bots remain ready for the return of humankind, should the planet ever be deemed hospitable enough, but precisely when this will occur is unknown. Until then, Echo has his city to himself.

Echo is a TeenSynth: a bot built to be more human than mechanical, with a human biological system integrated with an electronic brain - complete with a malfunctioning E-Mote chip. He is 40% robotic, 60% human, and likes strawberry laces and binging tv - as well as trying to learn enough coding to help him recover his faulty memory RAM. When Echo sees a space pod crash land in the city park, his life is quickly bent out of shape. Inside the pod is a human: Pandora. Rich enough to be cryogenically frozen and held in a stasis called SpindleSleep, she has survived for 200 years. But she has no understanding of why she has been sent back to Earth alone.

Echo and Pandora's meeting is a shock for them both, and Pandora's panic and disorientation are strong. But she is determined to discover what has happened to the rest of the frozen human population - she cannot give up on finding her family.

There is humour in Echo and Pandora's newfound connection, as they navigate a world in its apocalypse. With a future full of uncertainty and confusion, together they must forge a new kind of unity as they face what lies ahead.

Jemima Breeds

Royal Blood

Aimée Carter, pub. Usborne

Do you find that the shenanigans of the royal family are a source of constant fascination? What if you could have an insider's view of them, of what it is like to be royal, to live with the royals but to be almost an outcast and, very certainly, in the eyes of certain royals at least, a bastard child?

Meet Evan, creation of Aimée Carter, the royal that they wanted to keep hidden.

When seventeen-year-old Evan is thrown out of her latest American boarding school with charges of arson hanging over her – it was honestly an accident and there was only one classroom affected - she is taken by the ever-present Jenkins, to England, to Windsor Castle, to the home of her family, and most importantly of her father, the King. Yes, Evan, or Evangeline to give her, her full name, is the bastard child of the King of England.

Fitting in was never going to be easy but Evan's past history of less than proper behaviour seems to have followed her across the pond. She very quickly finds herself in the spotlight, having been photographed with various members of the aristocracy after an ill-advised night out, prompting the press to try and find out who she is. Then, all-too soon she becomes embroiled in a murder investigation after a particularly eventful party. At this point in the story Carter does touch, with great sensitivity, on the subject of date rape and I very much appreciated the way she both wove it seamlessly in and took it very seriously in what is otherwise a very funny novel. From here on in family loyalty is of tantamount importance as are unlikely friendships. Evan begins to realise that there is more to her past history, to the 'truths' that she thought she knew and learns that the art of secrecy is not one of deception but one of knowing what to say, when and to whom.

I could tell you so much more about this story, but it would take far more words than I am allowed for the review and, well, I'd like you to find a copy of the book and find some time for a read because it really is highly original and utterly brilliant. I was also thrilled to learn it is just the first in a series.

Royal Blood is a story of royalty, scandal, murder, family, friendships, and love. It is my new obsession. I hope it will soon become yours too.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Spell Bound

F. T. Lukens, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books

One would not expect a non-magical, orphaned teenager and a rule-breaking, non-conforming sorceress to develop a loyal, supportive relationship but that is exactly what happens between Edison Rooker and Antonia Hex. A supportive, albeit complicated relationship that is defined by the strict business requirements of Antonia.

After the death of his magical grandmother, Edison seeks out Antonia and asks to work at her prestigious curse-breaking company, Hex-A-Gone, as office staff. Both have secret motivations for wanting each other and their working relationship is often tested as a result. Edison, subsequently 'named' Rook by Antonia, ably repairs all the electronics from coffee pots to cell phones that Antonia constantly breaks, proving himself of value to his employer, an incredibly powerful sorceress. Rook, for his part, just wants to be close to magic again and hopes to find some way of learning magic as Antonia's 'office staff'. Rook is hiding his secret invention – the Spell Binder, an instrument capable of finding the Ley Lines from which magic is drawn. But what's Antonia hiding? Her secrecy, warded office and unusual relationships with other sorcerers raise more than a few eyebrows – and not just Rook's. During an assignment, Rook encounters Sun, the cute but moody apprentice of Fable, the only other sorcerer that Antonia will reluctantly team up with on curse-breaking jobs. Rook is immediately taken with Sun and there soon develops a fraught relationship between the two young apprentices.

The author skilfully manages to highlight the insecurities of the young adults as they try and navigate their relationships with each other, their families, and their mentors. Both Rook and Sun, to different extents, try to mould themselves to fit other's expectations, to avoid being hurt, lonely and unaccepted. The constant teasing and banter between the two help to establish boundaries and create empathy for each other's personal circumstances. The reader finds it easy to relate to Rook and Sun although their relationship can seem somewhat contrived at points. Theirs is not the only relationship tested, however, and quickly the reader discovers that Antonia and Fable have an equally complicated backstory. As the story unfolds, the timeless need to combat an overly tyrannical 'authority' emerges as one of the main story arcs. Evanna Lynne Beech, Registered Sorcerer Grade 4, is the classic antagonist and proves herself to be a worthy foe, trying to uncover and disclose Antonia's crimes. There are many humorous moments throughout from singing mice to cursed doormats that lessen the tensions and are endearing.

Lukens succeeds in captivating the reader and ensuring that you route for Rook and Sun through the various battles they encounter. *Spell Bound* is a nicely balanced, highly enjoyable magical adventure with two lovable characters.

Sheri Sticpewich

Stateless

Elizabeth Wein, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

What an extraordinary novel of high stakes flying in the years directly before the outbreak of WWII.

A flying ace, Mrs Frith has organised a race for peace by inviting young pilots from across Europe to take part in a race from England around Europe and finishing in France. Each pilot has their skills, strengths, and weaknesses, all of which the reader discovers as the novel unfolds. There is also sabotage, murder, and dangerous dog fights to contend with.

Stella North, England's Flying Rose, is the only female taking part and she feels no fear in the sky. She will become nervous, anguished, and terrorised on the ground however, as she finds herself wrapped up in a plot to kill...with plenty of twists and surprises for the reader along the way.

It is not always as it seems and this group of European pilots will actually need to ignore the borders they live by, renounce the hierarchy of their homes and form bonds with those they are hearing propaganda about. Tense, gripping and entirely perfect, this was read in two sittings, as I was white knuckled, hopeful, and worried in equal measure.

Absolutely extraordinary!

Erin Hamilton

Warrior of the Wild

Tricia Levenseller, pub. Pushkin Press

Warrior of the Wild is a gripping fantasy YA novel that immerses you in a starkly hierarchical world where survival is paramount.

Seravin is one of many villages which must make yearly payment to a vengeful 'god' who must be appeased. The villages starve themselves to make the payment and so avoid the god's wrath. The highest rank among them are the warriors, who hunt dangerous beasts, the Ziken, in the barren, forbidden Wild which surrounds them. The novel follows the story of Rasmira, daughter of the leader

of Seravin, as she prepares for her warrior trial. Her father has pinned all his attention on Rasmira, to the exclusion of his wife and other daughters, training her to be the warrior son he did not have, and the next leader.

Isolated by this preference, Rasmira is the object of jealousy from the other male warriors and her own mother. She is betrayed mercilessly by someone she cares for during the warrior trials and cast out to the Wild with a *mattugr*, an impossible quest, to complete to be allowed to return. Rasmira's *mattugr* is to kill the god himself – a sentence of almost certain death.

Heartbroken, bitter, and unprotected, Rasmira must try to survive in the Wild and find some way to complete the quest. The Wild though is not as uninhabited as she thought and she learns the secrets on which her old life was built, but can she reveal the truth to her world?

Tricia Levenseller has created an immersive, at times chilling, world of fear, malignancy, and unexpected kindnesses. We root for Rasmira, as she uses her strengths and her wits to survive and cheer her on as she becomes a different kind of leader. A hugely satisfying, engrossing read.

Saira Archer

What Walks These Halls

Amy Clarkin, pub. O'Brien Press

Amy Clarkin's *What Walks These Halls* takes readers on a thrilling journey to Ireland as the O'Sullivan siblings work to revive their family's paranormal investigation business.

The O'Sullivans' father died while investigating Hyacinth House, leaving the family in shambles. Archer and Raven O'Sullivan, along with their childhood friends Davis and Fionn, clairvoyant Éabha, and real estate agent Cordelia, must come together to discover what really happened that night and unravel the mystery behind the haunted home.

Clarkin's story is both modern and relatable, featuring a YouTuber who experiences trouble in the house and characters navigating the Covid-19 pandemic. The book's emotional depth is palpable, and Clarkin beautifully illustrates the way the characters rely on each other to confront both their paranormal and personal struggles. The plot is filled with suspense, from the family drama to the ghostly apparitions that haunt the house, leaving readers rooting for the protagonists until the very end.

What Walks These Halls is an enthralling read that is sure to captivate teenage and young adult fans of horror and mystery alike. Clarkin's exploration of the human psyche adds an extra layer of intrigue, while the eerie atmosphere of Hyacinth House will keep them on the edge of their seats. Overall, this

novel is a must-read for anyone seeking a spine-tingling tale with compelling characters and a captivating plot.

Anne Singer

Non-Fiction Books

Automotive: A Visual History of Automotives

Matt Ralphs, illus. Ryo Takemasa, pub. Big Picture Press

If you're interested in cars, or any type of automobile, then this book is for you!

Automotive takes the reader on a visual journey through the history of automobiles. If you're looking to find out about the most iconic and impressive cars from history, or what the record-breaking automobiles of the future are, this book will give you the answers!

In *Automotive*, there are different aspects of automotives that are explored. A variety of famous races are studied throughout the book, including the iconic Le Mans as well as drag races and monster truck shows. Types of automobiles are investigated on different pages as well, from concept cars and motorbikes all the way to military cars. This book really does have a bit of everything in it.

The text on the pages is broken down into smaller sections and displayed around the central illustrations of the vehicles that are being explored. The pages are full of colour and the illustrations are so varied from page-to-page which makes this book even more engaging.

Whether you are interested in the facts and statistics behind different automobiles or just want to know more information about specific races, places or types of car, you will enjoy making your way through *Automotive*!

Tom Joy

The Big Story of Being Alive

Neal Layton, pub. Wren and Rook

A unique style of book explaining the science behind being alive. Breaking bigger concepts and scientific processes down into easy to understand chunks, this book will appeal to a younger reader keen to learn more about themselves. While it doesn't shy away from the science, the book itself could be read as a story. It has a lovely narrative style voice that will appeal to many.

The comic style illustrations offer a colourful and detailed background to the facts and information. Looking at growth, reproduction and cells, the science behind what it means to be alive is thoroughly explained and shown. Humorous asides and small jokes make the book an enjoyable read for the adult as well.

I thought it was cleverly designed and written with children in mind and I particularly liked seeing the differences in cell structures and sizes. *The Big Story of Being Alive* could really engage young readers to delve deeper into the science of humans and living things and to do further reading and research.

Erin Hamilton

The Brainiac's Book of Robots and AI

Paul Virr, illus. Harriet Russell, pub. Thames & Hudson

AI has been all over the news in the last couple of months. ChatGPT (and other AI systems like it) can write competent essays, research and compile statistics on many subjects and write meaningful sonnets in the Shakespearean style. It will, so they say, replace huge numbers of white-collar jobs. In our Brave New World, children need to understand what AI is, what it can do and, more importantly, what it can't do! *The Brainiac's Book of Robots and AI* is a valuable, accessible and entertaining primer on the subject for children, and one which I heartily endorse. Let's look inside...

Science fiction is responsible for many myths and so terms are defined. What is a robot? When is an automated machine not a robot? A useful list of criteria sorts the 'bots' from the 'not-bots'. New information for me! This section is followed by a quick jaunt through the long history of robotics (the Greeks were early players) before looking at the mechanical and sensory mechanisms that help a robot to function, a valuable introduction to basic robotic engineering. The information is laid out with copious illustrations and at no point becomes too dense or impenetrable.

The section called 'Mechanical Minds' explores how robots are taught to make decisions – which is NOT the same as thinking. Here, Jean- Marie Jacquard and his punch card instructed looms should have been mentioned before Babbage's analytical engine and Ada Lovelace. Further investigation shows how computers have surpassed human capabilities in many areas – playing chess and composing fugues – but haven't yet reached the heights of creativity. Imitating the music of Stravinsky is not yet doable by a computer. Phew!

All the way through the book there are interesting and reassuring illustrations of how robots and computers are helping humans in both their daily lives and in exceptional circumstances, doing the boring, dirty, and dangerous jobs that we wouldn't want to do. It is true that in the future, robots and AI will make many human jobs redundant, but they will also save lives. An artificial pancreas (surely a robot in disguise) will transform the lives of diabetics in the not too far distant future. Nanobots could chase down cancer cells. And there will be robots doing jobs that we can't even imagine yet.

It will be a Brave New World and this book has gone much of the way in demystifying and taming it. For children aged between 8-13.

Katherine Wilson

The Earth Book

illus. Hannah Alice, pub. Nosy Crow

The charm and character of this physical geography introduction for Key Stage 2 lies in its superimposing globe-shaped windows, each painted to explore an aspect of our Earth and designed to make clear, colourful, and attractive composite illustrations. There's good tactile retro fun to be had in flipping the pages to reveal new layers of information. Keyed to each themed window is a spread of facts, explanations and illustrations. 'Water World' comes with a diagram of the water cycle, explanations e.g. of the difference between salt water and fresh, facts like the Earth being covered 70% by water, and an illustration of a stream wherein a heron patiently stands.

It's the sort of book that you'd find in a library or a garden centre: places where a long shelf-life and a broad appeal are key virtues. It's very pick-upable and browsable. Very amenable to reading in pairs, lots of things to point out to each other and think about. I like it. Hannah Alice has done a smashing job with her diagrammatic almost infographic illustrations and page layouts, and her use of colour is superb. I've lived with the book on my desk for a week now and still find it visually refreshing and engaging.

The text is clear, concise, and complete. It's highly readable without being obtrusive. There's a narrative to the book, so the sections aren't self-contained and do assume you've read the preceding ones. In that sense it's not an encyclopaedia, and my main quibble is that it isn't as complete as it could be.

I feel the book could have talked about more, e.g. tides and the moon, but that said it is best read in one sitting, and its present length and depth are about right for that. There's always scope to ask, 'What about...?', and question this kind of book's completeness, but before long you've added loads more pages that don't tie easily into a central window illustration and the book is spoiled, and this book is very fine, coherent and strong as it is.

I think Nosy Crow have got this one about right as an introductory text that'll build enthusiasm and understanding for deeper and wider learning. Worth seeking out for curious younger minds.

Dmytro Bojaniwskyj

How to be a Detective and other Crime-Fighting Jobs

DC Alexandra Beever, illus. Sol Linero, pub. Nosy Crow

Although it's usual to see books at KS1 about people who help us, such as doctors and dentists, there's not much available that cover a range of careers for younger children to explore so it's good to see a new addition to this informative and interesting series. *How to be a Detective* is the fifth book in the series with the other titles being: *How to be an Astronaut and other Space Jobs*; *How to be a Footballer and other Sports Jobs*; *How to be a Vet and other Animal Jobs*; and *How to be a Doctor and other Life-Saving Jobs*.

This title is aimed at children 5 – 9 years of age and looks at lots of jobs within the world of crime-fighting; as well as detectives, readers can find out about road traffic officers, those who work with criminal science such as forensic pathologists and crime laboratory analysts, dog handlers and mounted police. Unusual jobs such as drone pilots and forensic artists are also mentioned. In addition to a wide range of jobs, readers can find out why we need detectives, how to become one and what training is involved, what happens when a crime is reported, and a person goes to court.

The illustrations are bright and colourful, the text is presented in small bite-sized chunks and there is a list of useful organisations and websites for further exploration. An ideal book for any child interested in the Police Force.

Barbara Band

Human 2.0: A Celebration of Human Bionics

Patrick Kane, illus. Samuel Rodriguez, pub. Big Picture Press

Are cyborgs still something that we read about in futuristic science-fiction stories or are they now a possibility, a reality even?

With huge advances in technology and research, there is no limit to what scientists can achieve with bionics. So as people can replace injured or missing limbs with intricate bionic hands, or use neural implants to help them see, are we starting to experience a whole new age for this species? This could be the beginning of human 2.0.

This fascinating book explores the advances in bionic innovation and takes the reader through the journey from the first prostheses (think wooden, or iron limbs being locked into place) through to the most modern developments. The truth is that there is no limit to what can be created by scientists focused on developing bionics, whether that be chips to communicate wirelessly or store information, or new technology to help people with colour blindness to detect different colours that they see so this book explores the possibilities for the future as well as revisiting the successes from the past.

Patrick Kane uses the perfect balance of recounting previous successes and developments with the information behind how the different bionics work. The anecdotal aspect of the book includes stories about those who have benefited from developments with prostheses or new technologies, such as Richard Whitehead who is a world record holder for marathon running and a double-gold Paralympian medallist – these insights are particularly interesting and remind the reader of the importance that these developments have on so many lives. With his own experiences of prosthetic feet helping him to climb again after a mountain climbing accident resulted in his lower legs having to be amputated, Patrick was inspired to investigate how technology can, not only rehabilitate, but also expand human potential beyond natural ability to do certain activities.

The illustrations from Samuel Rodriguez suit the book perfectly, bringing a blend of science-fiction style images and portraits while using vivid colours to bring the pages to life. The book is thoroughly engaging.

Tom Joy

The Magnificent Book of Creatures of the Abyss

Bethanie Hestermann and Josh Hestermann, illus. Val Walerczak, pub. Weldon Owen

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if you were able to sink down into the cold dark abyss that is the deepest of deeps in the ocean? I know I have but now that I have enjoyed *The Magnificent Book of Creatures of the Abyss* I think that I am glad I can't get down there – it is scary!

Weldon Owen have ensured this title is stunningly illustrated, bringing the creatures of the abyss to stunning life, and they have done it so well that there were some pages I wanted to run away from! Those creatures of the abyss are frighteningly real and fascinating too. If you are even just a teeny tiny bit fascinated by the creatures of the deep then this is most certainly a book to be adding to your shelves. As well as the reality jumping out from each page the whole thing is scientifically accurate, presented in an accessible reading format that will appeal to the curious minds of children everywhere.

Dive thousands of metres below the surface of the ocean to discover the extraordinary life lurking there but beware, this is not for the faint hearted, his life is not always pretty or kind, after all it needs to survive in the darks of the deeps. There are creatures here such as the barreleye and the emperor dumbo octopus – named for exactly how they look as you will discover. I have to say I do love the pink see-through fantasia, what an amazing creature, a swimming cucumber is how it is described. I am not sure I would like to meet the vampire squid but the E.T. Sponge is aptly named! With fascinating facts for each creature this book will provide hour after hour of fascination.

If you want more you may be interested to know that there is a series of *Magnificent* books, (some more frightening than others) – *The Magnificent Book of Cats*; *The Magnificent Book of Horses*; *The Magnificent Book of Dangerous Animals* and *The Magnificent Book of Sharks*.

Colin Paterson

People Power: Peaceful Protests that Changed the World

Rebecca June, trans. José Enrique Macián, illus. XimoAbadia, pub. Prestel

People Power details thirteen peaceful protests that made a difference around the world and that brought about social change, drew attention to specific causes or defended human rights.

The book is international in scope covering protests from the UK, India, the United States, New Zealand, the Philippines, Estonia, Germany, Bolivia, Liberia, Tunisia and Sweden, and ranges from the Suffragettes Mud March in 1907 to the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020. The contents page lists the protests, which are in timeline order, but pages are not numbered which would have been useful. Some of the protests are well known, for example, Rosa Parks actions that led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott; others, such as the March for Territory and Dignity by the indigenous peoples of Bolivia, not so much.

Each protest features on four pages with the first double-page spread devoted to the background situation that led to people's actions and the following two pages detailed the results of the protest and the changes it brought about. The illustrations are simplistic, retro in style and engaging, and the text is simple and in short segments.

Aimed at 5 – 7 years, this book introduces children to a diverse range of protests and demonstrates how the peaceful actions of a large number of people can have an impact.

Barbara Band

Philosophy For Everyone

Clive Gifford, illus. Sam Kalda, pub. Magic Cat Publishing

Philosophy for Everyone examines 27 philosophical concepts chronologically ordered from Enlightenment through to Gender.

The book embraces both Eastern and Western philosophy. It therefore begins with Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) in India, born circa 623 BCE, two hundred years before Socrates himself, born circa 470 BCE, Plato, Aristotle and the foundations of Western philosophy. Confucius also pre-dates

Socrates. Confucianism features in a number of chapters in the book with important developments by Zhu Xi who lived 1, 600 years after Confucius, then by Wang Yangming in the fifteenth century and most recently in the twentieth century by Feng Youlan. It is a pity more reference could not be made to Asian philosophies, for example, of India.

The emphasis is however upon modern philosophy from the sixteenth century onwards. Consequently, there are chapters on many of the great European male thinkers you would expect to read about: Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Rousseau, Kant, Hume and Marx. It is not all men though. There is a chapter on Mary Wollstonecraft, and because the book extends into the twentieth century – including existentialism and postmodernism – there are chapters on the philosophy of Hannah Arendt, Simone De Beauvoir and – subverting a subject that is often characterised as the work of dead, white men - Judith Butler who is still very much alive!

Each chapter is a double page spread on one philosophical concept associated with a specific philosopher. These are contextualised, include a short biography of the philosopher, one or two key quotes and explanations of key ideas in front of a portrait and full colour illustration, typically enriching the context or representing a key concept. For example, behind Foucault's portrait are books that become prison cells, organised around a central watch tower with surveillance cameras in the foreground showing the panoptic gaze. This makes chapters easy to read and visually attractive, although some of the font sizes are small.

This book is different from other similar titles that can be found in bookshops with more Eastern, specifically Chinese philosophy, and by including more recent twentieth century philosophy, more women as well as, for the first time I think I have ever seen him included, Bertrand Russell.

Philosophy for Everyone is a great introduction to some of the world's most significant thinkers asking fundamental questions about ourselves and the universe.

Simon Barrett

Rhinoceros Can't Draw, But You Can

Sarah Walden, Luke Newell, illus. Griff, pub. Noodle Juice

I truly can't draw, well maybe stick people, flowers and trees come out as being reasonably recognizable but aside from that nope. Well, that was what I thought and then I picked up *Rhinoceros Can't Draw, But You Can*.

Although it sounds as though we are going to be led through this book by a giant grey horned animal it quickly transpires that Rhinoceros is not the only character who is going to be helping us discover our inner artist, he, and we, are given a helping hand by Orangutan (the expert), Tiger (artist in

residence), and Crocodile. Helping us all overcome our fears when faced when trying to draw, this book is inspirational. Not only does it use wild animals to tame our artistic tendencies, but it also encourages all to have a go no matter what we think our ability with anything artistic might be.

Can I now draw? The jury is out on their decision still BUT I most certainly have more confidence when trying to draw. This wonderful book is all about boosting confidence, overcoming the fear of trying something, and the questions we ask to put ourselves off. It's about having a go, and with 10 big ideas to guide us there are plenty of opportunities and suggestions to have a go with. Starting with a warm-up, with getting together everything we need, then drawing lines, circles, and practising shading, on it goes. Each of the big ideas is supported by its own warm-up, plenty of reassurance and advice and then space for our own drawing with some examples to follow.

Gently funny, with our guides making plenty of their own mishaps, this is a hugely encouraging art book.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

The Truth Detective

Tim Harford, illus. Ollie Mann, pub. Wren & Rook

The Truth Detective encourages us to think critically about the world using data. While data - numbers and statistics - can be often misleading and misunderstood, the book gives readers the knowledge and skills to investigate the truth and become a Truth Detective.

Tim Harford is a popular writer, author of *The Undercover Economist* and more recently *How To Make the World Add Up*, and broadcaster, presenter of BBC Radio 4's *More or Less*, investigating each week the stories behind the statistics often (mis-)quoted in the news. His credentials on this subject are impeccable and he is an incomparable communicator, employing both masterfully in this book for young readers.

Truth Detectives need to first find data, then use their brains, but also possess a number of attitudes. *Section One: The Truth Detective Mindset* warns against confirmation bias using the accessible idea of a brain guard. Use data carefully like using a magnifying glass to peer closely at something, but also put the magnifying glass down and see how people experience the world. *Section Two: The Skills of a Truth Detective* explains how to observe the label and understand exactly what is being claimed, check whether the data includes the successes and the failures and that it offers a meaningful comparison. *Section Three: How to Crack Difficult Cases* introduces Florence Nightingale, who used graphs to show the importance of hygiene, Watson Watt and Skip Wilkins development of radar, and a contemporary inspiring story of three teenage friends who ran an Australian COVID database.

Tim Harford's writing is very accessible, presenting complex ideas using simple maths and building upon existing knowledge. For example, he looks at the label 'rich', simply defined as someone who has more money, however there is a difference between income and wealth. This he illustrates using the example of Jill, with a regular babysitting job, and Ted who gets pocket money. Whilst Jill earns more money, she spends it as quickly as she earns it. Ted however saves his money so he can buy a games console. Moreover, Harford is a true maestro of the hook, with intriguing ideas encouraging you to continue reading, using a number of curious cases throughout the book, including the Prophetic Poop highlighting the difficulty of predicting the future based on past performance or the Unobservant Granny and how comparisons might change in time. Peppered throughout the book are several inspiring real-life stories of Truth Detectives (and a Truth Villain) such as Abraham Wald, whose counter-intuitive thinking saved the lives of many air crews during WWII.

The Truth Detective equips and inspires young people to use data effectively to not only make sense of the world, but also transform it.

Simon Barrett

Who Ate What? A Historical Guessing Game for Food Lovers

Rachel Levin, illus. Natalia Rojas Castro, pub. Phaidon

This is a rather intriguing book, aimed at children aged between 5 and 8 years old, that looks at what food people ate at various times throughout history. Each time period has two double-page spreads devoted to it; the first shows a relevant illustration and has a short introduction covering what food was around at the time. For example, the page "What did Ancient Egyptians Eat?" shows pyramids, people fishing, traditional buildings, someone being carried in a sedan chair, etc.

Readers are invited to spot three items which should not be there.

The second double-page spread shows people eating food and has drawings of various food items that would have been on the menu with a short description. There are also the three "Off The Menu" items from the previous page. The periods covered include - Cave People; Ancient Egyptians; Aztecs; Vikings; Medieval Monarchs; Ninjas; Pirates; Qing Emperors; the Ethiopian Empress Taytu; and astronauts. There's also a section on foods of the future and a few recipes to try. Roasted acorns a-la caveman times sounds interesting.

One thing I would really have liked is a contents page so that you could see what was in the book at a glance. However, it's a fun book to peruse and pour over that is bound to result in comments about some of the things that were eaten – I had no idea that the Egyptians ate hippos or that Ninjas ate tofu, which I've always thought of as a modern food stuff.

Barbara Band

Wonderfully Wired Brains: An Introduction to the World of Neurodiversity

Louise Gooding, illus. Ruth Burrows, pub. Dorling Kindersley

Graphically appealing with clear and concise information, this introduction to the world of neurodiversity follows the tradition of the best Dorling Kindersley information books. Its presentation is appealing and not overwhelming.

The topic is an important one and this book will be a welcome addition to any school library or class book corner, as it provides younger readers with a clear introduction to this subject. The author uses accessible language to explain the terminology and the various definitions which are encountered when detailing how brains work and describing aspects of neurodivergence.

While understanding of neurodivergence has grown particularly in the recent past, awareness of neurological differences has been present since ancient Egypt and this book includes a timeline which chronicles some important discoveries.

Historical figures which experts believe may have been neurodivergent are mentioned and so are contemporary figures who are helping to understand and to celebrate neurodiversity.

The approach is balanced throughout the book, which also includes tips on how to take care of one's brains, like mindfulness, physical activity, hydration and rest, and ends with an invitation to the readers about continuing to widen their knowledge of this topic.

Laura Brill

Picture books

All the Wonderful Ways to Read

Laura Baker, illus. Sandra de la Prada

Captain Looroll

Matt Carr

The Girl Who Loves Bugs

Lilly Murray, illus. Jenny Løvlie

Grandpa and the Kingfisher

Anna Wilson, illus. Sarah Massini

Molly, Olive, and Dexter

Catherine Rayner

Much Too Busy

John Bond

My Mummy is a Witch

Helena Garcia, illus. Jess Rose

One Hungry Dragon

Alastair Chisholm, illus. Alex Wilmore

Shine Like the Stars

Anna Wilson, illus. Harry Woodgate

Some Do, Some Don't

Dipacho

The Spaces In Between

Jaspreet Kaur, illus. Manjit Thapp

Standing On One Leg is Hard

Erika McGann, illus. Clive McFarland

There's No Such Thing as Dragons

Lucy Rowland, illus. Katy Halford

Junior books

Annie Lumsden, the Girl From the Sea

David Almond, illus. Beatrice Alemagna

Bella Beetroot

Martin Auer, illus. Axel Scheffler

The Boy Who Saved a Bear

Nizrana Farook

Dandy the Highway Lion

Stephanie Sorrell, illus. Roxana de Rond

The Double Trouble Society

Carrie Hope Fletcher, illus. Davide Ortu

The Gold Medal Mysteries: Thief on the Track

Ellie Robinson, illus. James Lancett

The Great Fox Heist

Justyn Edwards, illus. Flavia Sorrentino

Honey's Hive

Mo O'Hara, illus. Aya Kakeda

Ivy Newt and the Storm Witch

Derek Keilty, illus. Madga Brol

Leeva At Last

Sara Pennypacker, illus. Matthew Crodell

Lost on Gibbon Island

Jess Butterworth

My Especially Weird Week with Tess

Anna Woltz, trans. David Colner

Nic Blake and the Remarkables: The Manifestor Prophecy

Angie Thomas

Wider Than the Sea

Serena Molloy, illus. George Ermos

Young Adult books

Boy Like Me

Simon James Green

Chaos & Flame

Tessa Gratton, Justina Ireland

Crossing the Line

Tia Fisher

The First Move

Jenny Ireland

Good For Nothing

Mariam Ansar

HappyHead

Josh Silver

Let's Play Murder

Kesia Lupo

The Memory Eater

Rebecca Mahony

My Love Life and the Apocalypse

Melissa Welliver

Royal Blood

Aimée Carter

Spell Bound

F. T. Lukens

Stateless

Elizabeth Wein

Warrior of the Wild

Tricia Levenseller

What Walks These Halls

Amy Clarkin

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Matt Ralphs, illus. Ryo Takemasa

The Big Story of Being Alive

Neal Layton

The Brainiac's Book of Robots and AI

Paul Virr, illus. Harriet Russell

The Earth Book

illus. Hannah Alice

How to be a Detective and other Crime-Fighting Jobs

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Human 2.0: A Celebration of Human Bionics

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People Power: Peaceful Protests that Changed the World

Rebecca June, trans. José Enrique Macián, illus. XimoAbadia

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Clive Gifford, illus. Sam Kalda

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