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Contents

Book Reviews

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| 1. Picture Book Reviews | Page 2 |
| 2. Junior Book Reviews | Page 10 |
| 3. Young Adult Book Reviews | Page 21 |
| 4. Non-Fiction Book Reviews | Page 31 |

Books Reviewed Page 40

Picture books

The Boy and the Sea

Camille Andros, illus. Amy Bates, pub. Abrams Books for Young Readers

Summer is here and I am immersed in this poetic representation of life in sync with the tides of the sea. Each page, quiet like time, cool blue, sea green, each shade intermingling like the perfect match of art and words.

The Boy and the Sea is a tranquil creation for any aged above 7-8. Author, health science graduate and ballet dancer Camille Andros, along with artist and illustrator Amy Bates has instilled a sense of curiosity for the voice of the heart which always resonates with that of nature. Here it is the great, mysterious, turbulent, soothing and wise sea. It is the sea which answers his metaphysical and existential questions, the little boy puts his ears to the conch and hears the loving and encouraging call of the sea. At times, in the book, it is Dream, on others it is Love, and sometimes it is just Be.

The beach is the setting for time's play - the boy who resonates so much with the sea is present with his grandfather, intrigued about the messages given by the sea - which changes moods throughout the year just like the boy. It teaches him through the different phases of his life and in the end when he's become the grandfather, the sea welcomes another budding soul to impart its wisdom.

Definitely recommended as a beautiful and soothing summer read for anyone who loves the sea and wants to instil a sense of aesthetics, connection with the natural world and curiosity for life in kids going through their developmental phases.

Ishika Tiwari

Georgie Grows A Dragon

Emma Lazell, pub. Pavilion Children's Books

Georgie loves growing plants and looking after them. She is fortunate (and green fingered), she can grow absolutely anything. Anything ... as we see when one night, after finishing her planting, she goes to bed only to wake up the next morning to find she has grown a dragon!

Thinking she has grown a flower Georgie tries to water it, re pot it, then bring it indoors as a house plant. The trouble is all this makes the dragon angry. Then he gets angrier and angrier still. Georgie tries everything she can think of to make the dragon happy.

When Georgie realizes that the dragon is a dragon and not a flower the fun begins. She learns that dragons don't want to stay forever, they want to spread their wings. So, she wonders would a unicorn want to stay ...?

I really enjoyed this charming book. The story was interesting and it gently highlights the need to look after the environment, giving readers tips about how to look after it. This book was also about my two

of my favourite creatures - dragons and unicorns. The illustrations are beautifully drawn and packed with details intricate and also complementing, helping to tell the story.

This is a lovely book about friendship and also one that is ideal for animal and nature lovers.

Helen Byles

Grandma's House of Rules

Henry Blackshaw, pub. Cicada Books

Love Grandma as he does, our narrator has a tough time navigating all her rules. Some are just annoying, like not leaving your toys on the floor, others are quite random, for example not sitting on a chair that's just for looking at. In this house, which is somewhat full of nick-nacks of the heirloom variety, there is a mighty blue and white vase, epic and Grecian, balanced on a tiny table in the middle of the room. Grandma's most important rule is to never ever touch it. Enough said: our hapless narrator never stood a chance!

Cuddled up with his Grandma in the armchair, the narrator asks Grandma why she has so many rules. It turns out that the rules are family heirlooms too, and Grandma has never questioned them before. When the inevitable happens, the guilty party is distraught. But that's when they both find out a thing or two: Grandma discovers that change isn't necessarily bad, and the narrator learns that his Grandma, with her folded arms and her pursed lips, has a heart of gold.

The illustrations are full of colour, pattern and detail. The characters' expressions are entertaining – my young reader was particularly taken by the commentary given by Grandma's cat, via hilarious non-verbal communication. New readers can participate by reading the speech bubbles.

This is a sweet, funny story of forgiveness and recognizing what is really valuable in life.

Jackie Spink

Grandpa Across the Ocean

Hyewon Yum, pub. Abrams Books for Young Readers

Ah! Did I just read one of the most adorable books ever! Summers are a time for vacations, trips to the beaches, reuniting with family and friends for sweet moments together. Here is a young child visiting his grandfather in Korea, his grandpa from across the ocean, and forming a bond which he'll never forget.

Replete with warm and cute illustrations by the award-winning author and illustrator Hyewon Yum, *Grandpa Across the Ocean* celebrates the sweet connection children form with their grandparents, one which becomes an exchange of wisdom, curiosity, connection and building of beautiful moments together.

Hyewon Yum is from South Korea and now resides in New York with her family. This book is also a dedication to the memories of her own summer holiday trips to South Korea. In this book with its soft and cozy illustrations you'll see and understand how the boy develops an emotional repertoire with his grandfather and realizes just how his grandpa participates in the development of memories with him in. This is an example of one such beautiful exchange-
"He teaches me his Korean words and I teach him how to say them in English."

There are many other instances where the little one enjoys the day with his grandfather and these make it into an adorable rendition of familial love. Definitely recommended for children above 7 years of age developing their emotional intelligence and connecting with the world around them on a deeper level.

Ishika Tiwari

Home of the Wild

Louise Grieg, illus. Júlia Moscardó, pub. Floris Books

Home of the Wild by Louise Grieg and Júlia Moscardó is a powerful, heart-felt story about a nature-loving young boy and the orphan fawn he rescues. The boy is immediately likeable. He has "mended tails and patched up wings" and clearly has a strong connection with animals and nature.

The boy falls in love with a fawn he finds alone and hungry. He wants to keep her, but his mother gently reminds him that a "house is not a home for wild things; Wild things need to run, and soar, and swim." Once the fawn has grown strong, the boy must say goodbye. He is heart-broken as his dear friend departs. So it is that when a storm threatens, he runs into the wild filled with worry for his fawn. But this time, it's the boy who is in trouble and we are shown the wonders of nature as the fawn comes to his rescue. The story ends with the boy accepting that the wild is indeed where his fawn belongs and saying a very tender goodbye.

The illustrations show stunning Scottish landscapes in spring and are a delight to study as the story unfolds. The elements feel like another character in the story as we encounter sunshine, wind, rain, and the storm itself.

The writing is lyrical and makes for a soothing read. The dual messages of connecting with nature, and learning when to let go of those we love, endure long after the story ends. The reader can take comfort in knowing that the boy and the fawn will always "hear each other's heartbeat on the wind."

A highly recommended read all animal and nature lovers.

Evelyn Bookless

The Hugasaurus

Rachel Bright, illus. Chris Chatterton, pub. Hachette Children's Books

The power of a hug has never been more talked about or so universally desired, and this book sums it up perfectly. After all we all need them and children perhaps more than anyone else. A hug, the hug, can make all the difference on some many levels and for so many reasons. The hug to say well done, the hug for comfort the hug for joy ... the list could go on.

Everyone will have experienced the journey the Hugasaurus goes on; it is a simple but beautiful exploration of how it feels to go out into the world on your own for the first time, how to navigate friendships, and how to negotiate difficulties when they come (oh, and the wisdom of parents too!). These expressed experiences combine to make the book relatable, timeless and one to be shared over and over again.

The gentle but strong message of this book is that kindness saves the day, and it will surely be a real boost to any children learning to find their feet in the big wide world. Accompanying this wonderful story arc are the endearing illustrations in bold, vibrant colours, and satisfying rhymes which sing off the page. This is the perfect book for Hugasauruses of all sizes to cuddle up with!

Lucy Hollins

I'm Not (very) Afraid of Being Alone

Anna Milbourne, illus. Sandra de la Prada, pub. Usborne

This book could not have come out at a better time! We have all felt that little bit of loneliness, during these past few months, when we have had to stay away from each other, so we can empathize when the little girl develops a fear of being alone.

Anna Milbourne's book tells the story from the perspective of the little girl and, although aloneness is the backdrop to it, the overriding emotion explored is worry and anxiety. When children become nervous, they do not always understand it nor have the vocabulary to express it and, in this story, the behaviour of the little girl is one of clinginess to her father, who is blissfully unaware that there is a problem at all!

However, there are little hints, throughout the book, of the beautiful, reassuring relationship the little girl has with her father – check out the little hearts and stars that wisp about the two of them and form and magical link between them, when they are apart. These increase throughout the book, as the little girl's worries starts to fade away. By the end of the story, they are everywhere, representing happiness and contentment.

This is the genius way that Sandra de le Prada demonstrates the reassuring bond between father and daughter. This story is about finding the courage to talk about your worries and that this brave step is the beginning of making things better.

It is wonderfully written, with humour, and the illustrations are bright and colourful. It is such a joy to read, and I am sure it will help many children overcome any worries of separation.

Claire Webb

Just Being Ted

Lisa Sheehan, pub. Buster Books

Ted the dragon wants to make friends, but the problem is that the other animals are all frightened of him. All they see is his smoky breath and scary claws. So the beautiful gifts he makes – cakes, paper boats and bird houses – are never appreciated and he is always alone. On a trip to town he discovers that a Bears' Picnic Party is about to take place. Can he use his sewing skills to make a disguise and join in with the fun?

Readers cannot fail to love Ted. He is such a generous and loving character, only alone because the other creatures never hang around long enough to find out what he is really like. But, as determined Ted says, "There has to be a way."

Ted's journey from outcast to being welcomed is an important one for children to understand: the need to look beyond surface appearances and discover the real person inside. With its mixture of poignancy, humour and action, this book will provide the perfect opportunity for a wider discussion about this whether in the home or classroom.

Lisa Sheehan's storytelling flair is complemented by her gorgeous illustrations. Each page brims with colour, energy and movement and is filled with lots of things to amuse and discover. This is particularly true of the double-page spreads that the reader can almost step into.

Just Being Ted bursts with wisdom, love and empathy, encouraging children to understand that we may not all look the same or act in the same way, but that we are all worthy of kindness and friendship. That the book does so in such a charming and heart-warming way, will ensure its longevity – both as a beautifully illustrated story and through its enduring message. A wonderful book.

Julia Wills

The Little Things: A Story About Acts of Kindness

Christian Trimmer, illus. Kaylani Juanita, pub. Abrams Children's Books

On the day after a mighty storm, a little girl, who likes the feel of the sand between her toes and to have her hair in 3 bunches, finds thousands of sea stars (starfish to British children) stranded on the shore, and returns as many as she can to the sea.

An old man, who also likes the feel of the sand between his toes, is puzzled, as she can't save them all, but she explains that she can save these, and he follows her example and saves some. On the next day, he takes his grandson with him to rescue a dog. The boy tells his grandpa that he can't rescue them all, but grandpa explains that he's making a difference to this one. The boy helps an elderly lady whose garden has been messed up by the storm with garbage strewn around, and a teenage girl passing by asks what he's doing. He explains, and the lady says he has done more than clear her garden: he has lifted her spirits. The teenager packs an extra lunch and gives it to a homeless man ... and is observed by another family, and so the cycle of good deeds continues. After yet another storm, the little girl rushes to the beach to find- lots of people, including the old man, helping to put the damage right. "Now do you get it?" she asks him, and the old man does.

It's rather nice that every person has a short descriptive sentence explaining something they do or like: the boy likes butter on his noodles and multi-coloured laces, and the fact that the lady is elderly doesn't stop her doing pliés, as she was a professional dancer.

Christian Trimmer really does try to do at least one act of kindness every day from his home in New York, and the illustrations by Californian Kaylani Juanita fit with her mission "to support the stories of the underrepresented while creating new ways for people to imagine themselves", as they show a wide range of people and children.

This all sounds very worthy, but the lesson is pointed out gently. The setting is American, and although we may not have such mighty storms in this country, it is a charming, relatable story.

Diana Barnes

My Dad is a Grizzly Bear

Swapna Haddow, illus. Dapo Adeola, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

The first page shows a picture on the wall of the whole family, so we see his real dad. Real dad is also the real reflection in the mirror, but in his son's imagination he is a bear, as he's very hairy, and very fond of honey. It is as a bear that we see him in subsequent pages. He is liable to doze off anywhere, especially in the cinema, much to the boy's embarrassment, and stomps around at home looking for food, as he is always hungry. He never gets cold on "loooong family walks", is great at climbing trees, and has the loudest growl.

A family camping trip is very much Dad's idea, (and it always rains), but when Dad has wandered off into the woods, maybe, the boy thinks, to find his friends, Mum tells such a scary story that the two children shout for Dad and are delighted to have, as a result, "the biggest, warmest, best ever bear hug." Then, just when the reader thinks that's the end, there is another double-page spread where the boy says that there are scarier things than bears: "Wait until you hear my Mum ROAR!"

Dapo Adeola, born in Britain of Nigerian heritage, won awards for *Look up*, and his *Clean Up*, which followed last June, was well received, considering the situation. He actively encourages inner city children of various ethnicities to consider a career in illustration, and the pictures in this book of a happy and loving mixed-race family are an excellent example of representation of our multi-cultural country: Mum is black, Dad is white with ginger hair, and the two children are slightly differently brown, with ginger hair for the little sister. Dad's brightly-coloured clothing, with fabrics covered in bananas or pineapples, is echoed in the end-pages. This is a lovely colourful book and a nice story to share.

Diana Barnes

Pear of Hope

Wenda Shurety, illus. Deb Hudson, pub. E K Books

Pear of Hope begins with Anna and her friends playing around the much-loved pear tree at the bottom of her garden. The tree is a source of life, adventure, and solace. This joyful beginning is interrupted as we turn the page and find dark clouds and storms have taken over. Anna stands alone by the tree as it is buffeted by the wind.

Through the subtle interplay of text and illustrations we learn that Anna is dealing with serious illness. Cancer is hinted at but never explicitly named. Anna's suffering is mirrored by the changes the tree goes through. As it loses its leaves Anna is also at her lowest point. The tree is both a reflection of Anna's journey and a source of comfort and support. The seasons change and colour and hope return and Anna grows in strength. The tree becomes a symbol of resilience and renewal. As the tree endures so does Anna.

Pear of Hope is published by E K Books who specialize in books covering challenging issues for children in an engaging and accessible way. The book is a sensitive portrayal of a difficult subject and provides a message of comfort and hope. Complex conversations could be prompted by Anna's story. It would be a valuable book for children affected by the issues. It also provides a good starting point for developing empathy and understanding of the challenges some children face. Suitable for children 4 upwards, it would make an excellent addition to a school library.

Liz Speight

Peep

Meg McLaren, pub. Andersen Press

This is a nicely illustrated picture book that my 4-year-old boy and I enjoyed reading together. The pictures convey a sense of safety, even when the unexpected happens, which I thought was an important feature for little readers. The shades of colour revolve around bright greens, light blues, beige, light red and pink, all contributing to set a reassuring and familiar atmosphere depicting the garden, the park, the sky, dogs and toys.

The protagonists of the story are a dog called Dot and his favourite squeaky toy, a purple elephant called Peep. My son startled when Peep got stolen by another dog, as if his own favourite cuddly were stolen. The story encourages such empathy addresses the theme of the relationship between a child and his surrounding world, mirrored in Dot's fears. Words and pictures tell the story in a complementary way. This is a very successful aspect of the book. I liked watching a crack in Dot's garden fence gradually widen until it made the whole panel collapse, so that the boundary between Dot's garden and the park disappear. The pictures stand out more than the writing does, as I found some sentences not flowing perfectly while reading aloud.

Children will love the tenderness between Dot and Peep, together with the playfulness manifested by the other dogs by which Dot feel threatened, at first, but who finally become her playmates. The book is beautifully presented and benefits from having a hardcover. It would make a brilliant gift for dog loving children.

Francesca Magnabosco

Rain Before Rainbows

Smriti Hall, illus. David Litchfield, pub. Walker Books

A captivating picture book for 3–7-year-olds created by two stars of the children’s book world working together for the first time. Walker Books have also published an e-book version to raise awareness for Save The Children’s “Save with Stories” campaign to support the most vulnerable children affected by the coronavirus pandemic. By donating to this cause you can fund early learning packs, supermarket vouchers, essential household items and virus protection. To donate go to www.savethechildren.org.uk.

The bewitching illustrations accompanied by the lilting prose entice you to follow the interaction of a girl and her friend the fox as they cope with tough times following a fire in the castle where they lived. The essence of the book is summed up at the beginning by a quotation from Psalm 30:5; “Weeping may tarry for the night but joy comes with the morning.” Although this is equally a phrase that will most likely, I guess, be lost on the average 3–7-year-olds, without detailed explanation.

Dragons, battles, worries, darkness, dreams, crashing seas and adverse weather conditions are courageously contended with. And despite these setbacks, the girl and the fox with their new friends’ assistance and natures’ signposts search for a better life. The reader is drawn through the book by the mesmerising graphics which are spine-tinglingly good.

Follow as the girl and the fox leave the darker, gloomier first half of the book and progress towards the lighter, more inspirational second half. A positive message unfolds along their path urging the reader to hang on in there. Try not to give in to your fears, keep going forwards, make friends, be observant, resourceful, resilient.

This book will appeal to a variety of ages. Children will love it for the pictures and the prose that could easily be learnt and recited. Adults will recognise its appeal to their inner child. Some may find it just a bit too oversimplified to be meaningful whilst others will find it fits the bill nicely. A good resource for use at home or in school. The poetic “epic’ style story would make an excellent class recital on the progression of the coronavirus. All in all, a wicked little story progressing from great sadness, aided by hope and determination to reach a happy ending.

Elizabeth Negus

Sometimes: A Book of Feelings

Stephanie Stansbie, illus. Elisa Paganelli, pub. Little Tiger Press

How do you explain, to a small child what feelings are and their consequences? Well, Stephanie Stansbie’s book *Sometimes: A Book of Feelings*, does just that! This book uses rhyme, and other poetic devices, to relate feelings to things that we are already familiar with, such as: ‘Your body’s full of feelings: like the tide they ebb and flow. Sometimes they lift you high and sometimes they bring you low.’

It’s a wonderful introduction, for little people, to understand how to manage their feelings, through a story of two siblings exploring how their feelings can change over time. The reader can indulge in the

magnificently colourful illustrations of Elisa Paganelli, whose style creates such energy that captures the mood of each feeling wonderfully, from the different tones of grey that mimics bored and glum, to the many different hues of blue for sadness. The illustrations, in this book, really do compliment the story telling and the rhyme gives a playful quality too, capturing the essence of the children in the book.

The book concludes with the idea that, through all the ups and downs and rollercoaster of emotions, all will be well, in the end, because of the feeling of love. The added bonus of this book is the self-help page, at the back, that gives simple strategies to deal and cope with each feeling and emotion.

This is a book for sharing and reading aloud and can be enjoyed by young and old alike. I thoroughly enjoyed it and I'm sure you will too.

Claire Webb

The Whale Who Wanted More

Rachel Bright, illus. Jim Field, pub. Orchard Books

A very welcome addition to the growing collection of new takes on traditional fables, *The Whale Who Wanted More* is another brainchild of the outstanding partnership of author Rachel Bright and illustrator Jim Field. With four other animal-related titles already under their super talented belts, they turn their attention to that largest of marine mammals, the sperm whale. Funnily enough, the sperm whale used to be called the 'cachalot', and our hero, Humphrey, certainly does catch and cache a lot of things.

Humphrey is a great gentle giant, who cruises round the oceans, always on a quest. But for what? He doesn't really know, so he just collects anything that catches his eye, and that he hasn't already got. Every day there are new things to be spotted, things he just MUST have, but somehow by the next day they don't seem quite so exciting. Until one day... but that would be telling! And Humphrey isn't the only dissatisfied creature in the deep ocean, there are plenty of argumentative and selfish beasts, large and small, who need something to change their behaviour!

This is a book which is carefully correct in its rhyming text, with the right number of syllables and clues to allow young readers to predict, remember and accurately supply the rhymes. It just cries out for an audience, at home, in a small group, a whole class, even a whole collection of classes via video call. We even know when to whisper and when to shout by the size of the print! The moral of the story, like all the best fables, is actually a simple one, which allows something to come to light within our own abilities, something that we don't recognize but which is essential to our happiness. In Humphrey's case he rediscovers something that he always knew he had, but just hadn't considered important enough to satisfy his sense of wellbeing. The illustrations are splendid, especially on the dark backgrounds of the deep ocean, with plenty to search for amongst the images. An absolutely perfect integration with the text, making it an unmissable picture-book!

Bridget Carrington

Junior Books

A Glasshouse of Stars

Shirley Marr, pub. Usborne

“There are real things you ought to be scared of, you remind yourself. Like starting a new school, having to make new friends, a language you can hardly speak or read...”

Meixing Lim and her family have arrived in the New Land to begin a new life, where everything is scary and different. Their new house is ever-changing and confusing, and she finds it difficult to understand the other children at school. Yet in her magical glasshouse, with a strange black-and-white cat, Meixing finds a place to dream. As unexpected events change her life and her family forever, two new friends and the glasshouse of stars show her how to be brave and make the future shine brighter.

Based on the author’s experience of immigrating to Australia in the 1980s at the age of seven, *A Glasshouse of Stars* explores the culture shock of moving to a new, utterly different country through a sensitive child’s eyes. Marr does not shy away from the often painful challenges Meixing faces, but the story is always hopeful, seeing the wonder, adventure, and humour of the new too. An important theme is the difficulty immigrants face in communicating their stories when the language is new and unfamiliar, something Marr has discussed in the past, commenting: 'I've witnessed myself how first-generation immigrants may not possess the language skills to document these vital experiences.' In this context, Meixing's journey from mutely struggling to explain her feelings to growing confidence in her ability as a reader, writer, and storyteller is especially hopeful.

Although *A Glasshouse of Stars* is specific to the Chinese-Australian story, Marr has taken care to make her novel relevant to the broader immigrant experience, providing a relatable story for the many children who move to a ‘New Land’, while building empathy and understanding among their new classmates. There is also a nuanced, subtle exploration of grief, notable for how it shows not just the initial impact of a bereavement, but how it impacts in the weeks and months to come - and how friendship and support can help to make the stars shine bright again. A lovely, gentle, compassionate book.

Olivia Parry

An Alien In The Jam Factory

Chrissie Sains, illus. Jenny Taylor, pub. Walker Books

Young Scooter McLay lives with his parents in McLay’s Jam Factory, next door to Dodgy Doughnuts, which is where his parents used to work. McLay’s is the most famous jam factory in the world, with its amazing tasting jam and ingenious flavours. Their secret weapon is Scooter who has a unique talent for jam-related invention. Scooter also happens to have cerebral palsy as a result of an eight-minute delay of oxygen reaching his brain at birth. But this same delay has also produced “hyper creativity”, stimulating a brain fizzing with ideas like bubbles in a lemonade bottle.

Two dilemmas are introduced early on: (1) Scooter really wants a pet, but his parents will not allow it due to hygiene concerns at the factory and (2) the owner of Dodgy Doughnuts – Daffy Dodgy – is scheming to find out the secret of the factory’s success so that she can steal it and put them out of business, aided by her sidekick guinea pig, Boris. As far as the first goes, Scooter’s wish comes true when a tiny alien being from space, called Fizzbee, plops through the factory window one night. The second dilemma leads to our adventure.

This is a fabulously anarchic story with a lively tone and some hilarious wordplay – plenty of alliteration which Absolutely All Adore, of course! With a nod to Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory, Chrissie Sains has run riot with all manner of brilliant inventions. I loved the description of the mechanical factory assembly line with “huge robotic hands” and jam-filled pipes. There is so much imagination at play here, with the megaphone/ear trumpet/translator and Fizzbee’s suitcase of treasures. Daffy Dodgy is deliciously villainous and I loved her Bond style sidekick – the white furry Boris.

The overarching theme of this story is one of ability – emphasising what Scooter can do, deftly illustrated by the beautiful little scene where Scooter realizes, he has been guilty of underestimating Fizzbee, just as he has been underestimated in the past.

Jenny Taylor’s drawings perfectly complement this story and are full of entertaining and illuminating detail.

Children aged 7 up who love funny adventure stories and cunning inventions will very much enjoy this book.

Rose Palmer

Antigua de Fortune of the High Seas

Anna Rainbow and Oli Hyatt, illus. Steve Wells, pub. Chicken House

There has always been a mystery surrounding the age-old story of the Pirate King. However, as the Bloodmoon approaches, it is once again on the minds of the people of the fate their boys once suffered. Is the Pirate King truly gone or will their celebrations be ruined?

Antigua de Fortune of the High Seas is a lovely novel which takes you from the land to the high seas. It is full of sea creatures, mermaids, and the magic of the ocean. It is a magical and engaging story that sails the reader on a mystery with a very feisty young lady and her friends. It is written in a way that once, you understand the ways of the ocean people, becomes easy to follow. It is full of colour too as the descriptions used are exceptional allowing you to at once feel the spray on your face and the salt in your hair. What also comes across is the power of love and friendship. If you are intent on making things right, then this book shows that anything is possible if you put your mind to it. Work as a team, even with the most unlikely group of people and given the best leader, great things can happen.

The cover is engaging and intriguing and even though there are no illustrations throughout the book per se, the small illustrations at the start of each chapter, keeps you on the sea faring course. In the

first few chapters, the details of the people and their magic was slightly confusing as “madre” being mother is a term that not everyone would be familiar with, however, it soon becomes apparent and once I was a few chapters in, it was like rolling on the tide. Excitement built despite the anxiety of the story and by the time I was halfway through I was unable to put the book down.

If you like stories built around mermaids, pirates, and the sea, then this is the book for you. It is a little scary in places, but this builds the tension of the novel. The question you need to ask is: Does Antigua de Fortune save the stolen boys? I’m not going to tell you so you will have to pick up the book and read it for yourself!

Helen Finch

Bad Panda

Swapna Haddow, illus. Sheena Dempsey, pub. Faber

This little chapter book tells the story of Lin, who is “an absolute rotter of a panda.” But she did not start out this way; once she was the most adorable panda in the sanctuary. She was so perfect and cuddly that visitors came from all over to ooh and aah at her cuteness. But being perfect all the time is a huge effort for Lin, she has far more fun with her mischievous brother – Face-Like-A-Bag-Of-Potatoes – until her brother does something so bad he is banished to the far side of the sanctuary. Things get worse for Lin when she is in turn shipped off to a zoo far away. She determines to be the worst panda ever so that she will be sent back home again. Frustratingly, though, she cannot overcome her essential cuteness, however much she tries! So she hits upon a different plan and things get rather chaotic...

Behind the funny story there is a very sophisticated message around the anthropomorphizing of animals and the nature of zoos. Written by the same team who created the *Dave Pigeon* series, this is a really great format, and it uses the ever-appealing panda bear as its main character! There are eight punchy chapters over less than one hundred pages, a limited colour palette and it uses an engaging blend of straight text and comic strip. In look and feel it is reminiscent of Alex T Smith’s *Claude* series, Harriet Muncaster’s *Isadora Moon* and Laura Ellen Anderson’s *Amelia Fang*. For children reluctant to engage with dense blocks of text *Bad Panda* is accessible and still feels like a proper chapter book.

Children age 6-8 will enjoy this and hopefully there will be more *Bad Panda* adventures to come!

Rose Palmer

The Chessmen Thief

Barbara Henderson, illus. Sandra McGowan, pub. PokeyHat (Cranachan Books)

Anyone who has visited the British Museum or the National Museum of Scotland and seen the tiny figures of Viking life which are the Lewis Chessmen will relish this fictional explanation of how they came to be buried in the sand dunes on the Isle of Lewis in Scotland.

In this well-researched, exciting book Barbara Henderson imagines the adventures of 12-year-old Kylan, born on the Isle of Lewis but taken as a seven-year old, along with his mother, as a slave, by Viking raiders who transported them back to their homeland, the country which is now called Norway. Kylan it turns out is a handy person with a knife, but not, as we might imagine, to threaten foes with, rather to carve walrus ivory into beautiful patterns and shapes. He is a thrall, and his job is to fetch and carry for the workmen who make and carve items from the ivory. The very useful glossary at the story's end tells us that 'thrall' is a Norse word for a slave, and among many other explanations it also tells readers that Norse is an early medieval Scandinavian society and language.

At this time the Scottish islands were part of the Viking empire, and Kylan is determined to return to his home on the Isle of Lewis, in the hope that he can find his mother who has travelled back there as a Viking princess's maid. When a very special commission is placed with the workmen by Archbishop Birgersson Kylan sees an opportunity to escape. The Archbishop is on a mission to spread Christianity amongst the heathen of the Scottish islands, by first converting their leaders and then ensuring the ordinary people become Christians rather than believers of the Norse gods. Kylan's adventures vividly immerse us in Viking life, the craftsmanship as well as the violence, with detailed descriptions of the Lewis Chessmen, whose images beautifully head the chapters.

This thoughtful, fact-packed, engrossing middle-grade novel is an excellent antidote to counter the numerous tales of pillage and murder which tend to bias the resources for those young readers studying the Vikings.

Bridget Carrington

Harklights

Tim Tilley, pub. Usborne

A thoroughly enchanting fairy-tale for modern times, *Harklights* is as educational as it is compelling. The story follows in the footsteps of Wick, an orphan who spends his days tirelessly working in a matchstick factory for a wicked and greedy woman. But from this darkness a ray of light comes to Wick when he finds an 'acorn baby', his ticket out of the misery and into a life of magic with the Hobs: a clan of tiny magical people who live in the nearby woodland. A whole new world opens up for Wick as he is taken on a journey of discovery where he learns about trees, animals, leaves, and so much more.

This book weaves a wonderful tale about all the marvellous things that are lurking in our woodlands. However, it isn't all magic and wonderment, something threatens the lives of the Hobs and Wick won't stand for it. Not only is this a thoroughly enjoyable book, but it is also a great book to get children interested in nature and to teach them the importance of the animals and plants that live there. It has some interesting insights into the horrors of deforestation and pollution, while still being a compelling and cosy read. Moreover, it carries a strong message of hope something that, this year more than ever, we could all use more of.

Tim Tilley has adorned this book with his own charming illustrations, which perfectly reflect the characters of his story. While he has previously worked in illustration *Harklights* is his first children's novel, I just hope it isn't his last!

Harklights would be a lovely book for any child who wants to get more involved with nature, those who are never happier than when they are jumping in mudding puddles or looking in wonder at squirrels as they bound about in the park.

Rosie Cammish Jones

How to Make a Pet Monster: Hodgepodge

Lili Wilkinson, illus. Dustin Spence, pub. Allen & Unwin

Artie is eleven years old, he lives with his mum, stepdad (though he's not sure what to call his stepdad) and his thirteen-year-old stepsister Willow. He doesn't believe in ghosts or monsters, but he does believe in science, oh and that Willow is scary.

While searching though the attic of their new home, Willow and Artie come across a weird book called 'The Big Book of Fetching Monsters.' Of course they have to stop and read it ... it is whilst reading through the book that they come across a way to make their own monster, but Artie doesn't believe in monsters, because they don't exist, right? Well it was right until before they know what has happened they have Hodgepodge. Hodgepodge definitely makes life interesting, for while Artie and Willow are desperate to keep Hodgepodge a secret, Hodgepodge has his own secrets and a mission that is at first known only to him (of course).

This is a wonderful middle grade book, it's written from Artie's perspective and newly independent reader's will love the accessibly short chapters. Dustin Spence's illustrations help tell the story and rally give an extra dimension, bringing the character of Hodgepodge to life.

This is a great book dealing with important issues such as blended families, and I'm sure after reading this everyone (even those who don't believe in monsters) will want their very own Hodgepodge.

Helen Byles

Kate on the Case

Hannah Peck, pub. Piccadilly Press

When Kate, her Dad and her mouse-accomplice Rupert, or Roo for short, board a train to visit Kate's mum at the International Polar Station in the Arctic they have no idea of what an eventful journey it's about to be. No sooner have they set off than mysterious things begin to happen, missing gymnastic trophies, stolen gingernuts and the vanishing of ancient scrolls baffle the passengers. But who is responsible? Well, who better to investigate than wannabe reporter Kate? With the help of her handy 'Special Correspondent Manuel' and Roo by her side, Kate sets out to catch the thief and she's certain she already knows who it is. There's something fishy about fellow passenger Madam Maude and her cat Master Mimkins and Kate is determined to find out just what they are up to.

This deliciously written crime drama for young readers has all the mystery and suspense of a great Agatha Christie novel but with a humorous and unexpected twist in the plot.

Written and illustrated by the brilliantly talented Hannah Peck, the story is interspersed with wonderfully amusing images that make turning the page even more of a delight. With an array of colourful characters and a strong but simple plotline this book is impossible to put down as you follow Kate on her mission to catch the culprit. An exciting and gripping read for younger readers!

Tracey Corner

The Lightning Catcher

Clare Weze, pub. Bloomsbury

Alfie Bradley and his family have moved from a town to a small village. The weather there is bizarre. Frozen puddles suddenly appear on a warm summer's day. Massive rainstorms break out just over his house. And it's not only the weather that's strange. There's a peculiar man called Nathaniel Clemm who lives in a weird house. Rumour has it that he's doing experiments on animals. It seems he might be involved in the odd weather phenomena too.

Alfie persuades his new friend Sam that they need to investigate. They break into the Nathaniel's garden and find a box with wires coming out. They crack it open, releasing a massively powerful, seemingly electrical creature. It's not long before Whizzy, as they call it, starts creating havoc. Alfie gets the blame for everything that happens. The head of the parish council was already convinced his behaviour was out of order. Now he's in big trouble. It doesn't help that his father is away working in Sweden, and won't really listen to him, nor that his older sister Lily has an eating disorder and mental health issues brought on by bullying in the town where they used to live. Even Sam refuses to have anything to do with him. How can Alfie put things right?

This is a very impressive middle-grade novel. Children will be gripped by the fast-moving plot, and by the characters, not least the wondrous Whizzy. Clare Weze has worked in biomedical and environmental research. She weaves science and fantasy intriguingly and enjoyably together. She skilfully interlaces important social and emotional themes too.

Like the author, Alfie and Lily have British and Nigerian heritage. They are the only children in the village who aren't white. The antagonism Alfie meets from the head of the parish council is clearly racism though this is not overtly stated. Lily's mental health issues are sensitively treated. The first-person narrative from Alfie's perspective works very well. Recommended.

Anne Harding

Melt

Ele Fountain, pub. Pushkin Children's Books

What if things are not what they seem to be, be it for our own family or the world we live in? Ele Fountain, the acclaimed author of *Boy 87* explores this issue in her latest novel *Melt*. Through the lives of her characters Yutu and Bea, Fountain takes the reader on an action-packed adventure in the Tundra, involving snowmobiles and planes.

Yutu lives in an arctic remote village with his grandmother and with each passing year, their way of life is threatened by the melting snow and ice around them. Bea lives in the city, struggling to make friends at yet another new school. Her father is her ally but when his behaviour becomes odd, she grows worried as she wonders why. Suddenly, Bea and Yutu's lives collide in a way neither could have ever imagined. Then begins a race against time as they scoot across the snow to safety.

Readers can easily relate to Bea and Yutu. Whether it is their teenage restlessness or acute perceptions, it sets the scene, and the pacy narrative keeps the reader glued to the pages.

Travelling with Yutu and Bea I could feel the icy wind blowing on my face as the arctic region came alive in these pages. Fountain highlights the issue of climate change through irresponsible actions of profiteering corporations and the effects they can have on traditional lifestyles such as Yutu and his grandma. The title *Melt* is a hard-hitting, apt word that captures the essence of the story.

This racy adventure is aimed at middle grade readers but recommended for anyone who loves an engaging read with an urgent message at its core.

Asha Krishna

The Nightsilver Promise

Annaliese Avery, pub. Scholastic Children's Books

In the Empire of Albion, which is ruled by science, everyone's destiny is predetermined and told to them as infants, but not Paisley Fitzwilliam's. Paisley has been waiting thirteen long turnings to hear her destiny. Now she's been summoned and she's sure the stars are about to tell her she will be an explorer just like her father. So, when Paisley learns that she will die before her fourteenth turning she's shocked and confused. Determined to keep her destiny a secret from her family Paisley resolves to carry on like normal. That is until her mother goes missing and is presumed dead, leaving Paisley alone to protect her Dragon Touched brother Dax.

What follows is a gripping, breath-taking adventure through a reimagined world where the Floating Boroughs of upper London hold secrets and an ancient power stalks the dark sewers of lower London.

This is the first book in a magical, fantastical trilogy from the wonderfully talented, debut author Annaliese Avery whose richly imagined world where the Great Dragons are no more and the Celestial Mechanism pre-determines our track, is every bit as incredible as the world of Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*.

However, be prepared to dive in, Annaliese thrusts her readers into her world from page one and you are swept along with Paisley on her sometimes dark and twisting rollercoaster of a quest. Bursting at the seams with both science and magic *The Nightsilver Promise* raises deep questions such as whether our destinies are predetermined or whether we have free will over our path in life. The believable characters and powerful storyline had me turning page after page. Add to this more than a sprinkling of stars, a little magic, a good helping of dragons and a wonderfully endearing and brave

protagonist and you find Annaliese Avery has managed to create the most wonderful world to escape to.

The only problem...the wait for book two!

Tracey Corner

Philosophy Resistance Squad

Robert Grant, pub. Little Island Books

Join student no. 8728473 aka Milo Moloney and his friends on a thrilling, action packed, philosophy filled adventure, exploring ways to resist their sinister headmaster's excruciating system with their 'shamazing' philosophical friend Ursula.

I will start off by saying, this book is a great way to teach children and adults alike about philosophy. It brings many different emotions to the table such as rebellion, longing, helplessness, perseverance and triumph. Threading a magnificent tale of courage, questioning and thrills - through the middle of an epic fictional adventure. Though this book has a familiar plot-line of school/teachers conspiring against children, it also teaches children how to question authority, in the right way!

In my opinion, the age to be reading it without an adult should be 9+ since there is a touch of foul language and mild violence and if your child is younger, you may need an adult's help. This book would be enjoyed by children who love futuristic vibes, rebellion stories and philosophical quotes (since there is a quote or question to ponder on every chapter). This gives children a window into the world of philosophical thinking.

It is not similar to any other book I have read (although it does give a sprinkle of *Demon Headmaster*) making it unique and that quality makes it really shine through. I recommend discussing the chapter quotes and philosophy scripts just so you can take them in.

To summarise, this is an amazing book to help teach people about philosophy whilst telling one of the most amazing stories.

Archie (age 9)

Rise of the Shadow Dragons

Liz Flanagan, pub. David Fickling Books

The return to Arcosi is an interesting one; the changes made by Duke Vigo and Tarya seem to be positive and offer more freedom to the people, but the formation of the Brotherhood seems to be turning the island into a more dangerous place, once again.

Jowan desperately wants to have his own dragon, and things are looking encouraging for him – he is related to some of the most famous dragonriders, he has been around dragons all of his life, and he has been dreaming of a purple dragon. When Hatching Day passes without Jowan being paired with a

hatchling, he becomes so distraught that he acts out in an unforgivable way. In shame, Joe goes into hiding, sure that everyone will be better off without him until he can make amends. It is down in the hidden tunnels and chambers of Arcosi, however, that Jowan really discovers his true destiny and will have the opportunity he desires; to right his wrongs. But the Brotherhood are rising, and Jowan may not quite be ready for the clash that is about to commence.

Rise of the Shadow Dragons is the sequel to *Dragon Daughter*, the first book in the *Legends of the Sky* series. While many of the characters from the first book remain constant in this book, there are enough new faces to enjoy getting to know as well.

The cover art by Angelo Rinaldi is terrific and draws the reader to the book straight away: the large shadow dragon surrounded by fire offers a perfect contrast between dark and light.

Tom Joy

Secrets of a Schoolyard Millionaire

Nat Amore, pub. Rock the Boat

What would you do if you found a million dollars? Ask this question at any point in any conversation (more or less, use your judgement) and it's guaranteed to give an interesting reaction. As such, it forms a compelling premise for Nat Amore's debut novel for 8- to 12-year-olds.

The main character, Tess, is placed in exactly this situation and *Secrets of a Schoolyard Millionaire* follows her and her best friend, Toby, as they try to work out what out the best way to spend money, and learn some valuable life lessons along the way. There are two things that make this book stand out. The first is the pace. Amore writes with the confidence a good plot can bring – there is no need for drawn out 'fillers' because the action zips along with exuberance and energy. Such is the strength of the narrative that we the ending is revealed in the first chapter – and acts as a hook rather than a deterrent. Clever stuff.

Second is the morals. Despite its peppy tone and galloping plotline, this book has a strong moral core. Amore invites her readers to reflect on the importance of friendship, truth, altruism, honesty and integrity through a series of 'tips for life' that pepper the narrative. They are bite-size, light-touch and certainly not over directive or preachy – but nevertheless they invite the reader to stop; pause; consider ... and then plunge back in to see what happens next.

Secrets of a Schoolyard Millionaire is a book with bounce, combining action with integrity and an open door to explore some of life's bigger questions. Perfect for budding entrepreneurs, amateur detectives, would-be Greta Thunbergs and pretty much everyone in-between.

Laura Myatt

Twitch

M. G. Leonard, pub. Walker Books

Twitch is a story about trust, friendship and birdwatching. It follows a young boy called Twitch, who is a keen birdwatcher and often visits the nearby nature reserve of Aves Wood. Twitch gets bullied by Jack - a pupil at school - in the last week before the summer holidays, and is rescued by a stranger called Billy, with whom Twitch forms a friendship. When he was seven, Twitch's grandad built him his own human-sized bird box in his bedroom. Twitch had then decorated the interior to make it more homely. "It was his nest and he felt safe inside."

It is a heartwarming backstory, but since his own bed is shaped like a bird box, it brings attention to Twitch's biggest fault. Although "Ornithologists make good detectives," people's habits and intentions can't be observed as easily as watching them through a pair of binoculars, and the other characters are quick to remind him that people are not birds. Twitch starts an unlikely friendship with Jack, but he soon begins to learn for himself about the complexities of human behaviour. Billy tries to convince Twitch that he can't be friends with Jack, his former bully, and explains: "A leopard doesn't change his spots [...] You might know a lot about birds, kiddo, but you don't seem to know a lot about people."

Twitch is a coming-of-age story for its main protagonist, and a life lesson in human behaviour - set against the backdrop of birdwatching in a nature reserve. There is a subplot that a robber is on the loose, and this makes the story exciting to read, and has an important role in the later stages of the novel. The lessons for its readers are about the difficulties of knowing who to trust.

It is a fun story to read and would make a great book for a class to study in school, as it teaches its readers all about trust, friendship, making secret dens and exploring the countryside with friends and family.

Chris J Kenworthy

Young Adult Books

A Constellation of Roses

Miranda Asebedo, pub. HarperTeen

Published for the first time in the UK, Miranda Asebedo's 2019 novel is an engrossing twenty-first-century YA Bildungsroman, set within the landscape and communities which, a century ago, inspired Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* series. We are introduced to seventeen-year-old Trix McCabe, whose whole life so far has been a constant journey from one squalid small city motel room to another when the rent is overdue, and whose single-parent mother has just walked out on her.

Trix relies on her awesome ability as a pick-pocket to survive, until the day the police find her, when she's given two alternatives: youth detention or going to live with her distant family, who she didn't even know existed. Unhappy, bitter, resentful and determined to keep running, Trix doesn't take kindly to the three women in the farmhouse in the middle of nowhere, all of whom appear to have special gifts. Despite the amazingly restorative pies which Trix's aunt bakes, and which the whole small community of Rocksaw rely on as magical remedies for problems in their own lives, it takes a long time for Trix to feel secure enough to resist running away again and stop using her own special skill.

Asebedo writes with a powerful understanding both of teenage psychology, homelessness, abuse and depression, and (very) small-town life in the US. There is plenty which is raw and horrifying, especially in the early part of the novel, and in the flashback scenes as we learn more about Trix's past life. Gradually though, like Trix, readers become enveloped in the everyday life of the family, with acerbic Auntie (Trix's great-aunt), Trix's aunt Mia – the baker – and her cousin Ember, together with Trix's class-mate Jasper, whose family, we eventually learn, have their own. Despite the McCabe's apparently 'mom and apple pie' household we discover that their past lives are as complex as Trix's, and that their present bakery success has been and remains a cathartic exercise for all. A tough read at times, but un-putdown-able, because it is one which offers understanding, resolution and hope to YA and adult readers alike.

Bridget Carrington

A Gathering Midnight

Holly Race, pub. Hot Key Books

A Gathering Midnight imagines the world of Annwn, a dream parallel of London where sirens and selkies thrive in the Thames and dreamers wander at their leisure. Fern King and her twin brother Ollie have been integrated into the ranks of the Knights, an ancient order that patrols the city protecting dreamers against nightmares. But as leader, Sebastien Medraut's, mind control grows ever stronger in the bid to destroy Annwn and Ithr, the fabric between the worlds wears thin. Fern and Ollie must do all they can to protect both.

This is the second instalment in the *Midnight's Twins* Trilogy, and having not read the first – and fantasy not being a genre I typically reach for – I was pleasantly surprised by how easily I fell into this world.

A Gathering Midnight is a rich urban fantasy that explores the power of dreams and imagination whilst at the same time celebrating plurality and difference. I was particularly intrigued by how malevolent mind control affected fashion choices and even advertising, turning fierce colours into grey and conformity, giving me plenty of *Stranger Things* vibes.

The story is pacey, though not light on the detail, and is full of suspense and mystery. The character dynamics are interesting, involving and angsty - particularly the compelling sibling dynamic. Race's world building is deft and accessible and this second instalment sets up for what will surely be a wonderful finale. A book that can be read independently but that fits perfectly in its place as the middle instalment of the trilogy. Perfect for fans of Cassandra Clare's *Shadowhunter Chronicles*.

Jess Zahra

Ace of Spades

Faridah Abike-Iyimide, pub. Usborne

This young adult novel is centred on two main characters and is set in a high school. It is a thriller mystery which tackles some very real and important issues. The short chapters encourage reading by leaving the reader wanting more at the end of each one. The main characters are two young people from very different social backgrounds. Chiamaka is a rich girl. Devon is a poor boy. Chiamaka is confident, very popular and is the Head Girl at school. Devon is not so confident. He is quiet and a keen musician. He is also gay. Both Chiamaka and Devon are black children in a white dominated school, but in every other respect they are very different. To add to the thrill and tension, Chiamaka has a secret from her past which haunts her to the present day.

These two black students are targeted by an anonymous texter known as Ace. It seems that Ace is intent on bringing some dark secrets into the open. The reader is left guessing what these are as Chiamaka and Devon desperately try to track down and reveal the secret texter. Someone is definitely out to get them both and is determined to ruin their reputations and lives. This all adds up to a powerful and terrifying thriller. Who is Ace? Why are the two black students being pursued? Many texts are sent around the school trying to undermine and expose them. Is it just two students being bullied or is it something much more sinister?

This is a story written for young people everywhere. The issues covered are racism, gay relationships, drugs, prison, peer pressure and parent-child relationships. Faridah Abike-Iyimide is not afraid to delve deeper into these issues, which makes this a more exciting, thrilling and tense read. It looks at institutionalized racism and tackles the sinister and destructive nature of white supremacy. Systematic racism is an awful issue to face and it will make some readers feel uncomfortable. Credit is due to this young author for tackling these issues as part of an exciting and thrilling piece of fiction. The intrigue, the drama and the action all combine to make this story interesting, exciting and an excellent read for young people.

Gary Kenworthy

Bone Music

David Almond, pub. Hodder Children's Books

Bone Music is a book about reincarnation, personal transformation and the possibility of societal rebirth. In spite of these weighty themes, the 199 pages form an easily accessible YA narrative owing to the linear structure, direct vocabulary and sympathetically drawn characters.

Fifteen-year-old Sylvia is on a break in the countryside overlooking her home town of Newcastle with her mother, who is concerned that her partner's passion for war photojournalism will lead to his demise in Iraq. Sylvia meets the troubled school dropout Gabriel, who shows her the ways of the forest and the power of music from his ancient bone flute.

At the story's emotional climax, Sylvia has a transformative, nocturnal forest encounter with her teenage doppelganger. Following a ritual exchange of 'being', heightened for the reader through the use of poetic repetition, she is welcomed back to her temporary cottage home and later joins the village dance.

The local characters Sylvia gets to know have their immediate and reincarnated pasts: she learns of Andreas' time in the Hitler Youth and comes to understand what he means when he tells her that history is all around us. The rich countryside setting and importance of music and the heavens suggest a pantheistic aspect to Sylvia's transformation, her growing confidence and her new understanding of her place in the scheme of creation and potential to change it. The final pages describe Sylvia's re-connection with everyday life including her friend Maxime, whose absence has been enforced by poor rural mobile phone coverage. Sylvia is next seen at a London protest march with the placard messages Rebel for Life and There is No Planet B.

Bone Music is a skilfully written fable where details are revealed as significant. It is short but substantial; challenging but accessible; concise but universal. Highly recommended.

Trevor Arrowsmith

Eve Out of Her Ruins

Ananda Devi, trans. Jeffrey Zuckerman, pub. Fugitives

'One day we'll be invincible and the world will tremble. That's our ambition.'

An astonishing short teenage/YA/adult crossover title which almost defies literary categorisation, *Eve out of her Ruins* is also one of that rare breed of modern children's and YA fiction which has been translated from another language into English. Ananda Devi was born and lived in Mauritius until her late teens, and this novel is a reflection of the life of teenagers in the impoverished Mauritian neighbourhood of St Louis.

Devi wanted her novel, first published (in French) in 2006, to reflect the increasingly limited life of young people, not only in Mauritius but throughout the world, disenfranchised by the growing gap between rich and poor, by prejudice, racism, unemployment and discrimination. There is no direct interaction between the characters, as Devi's novel tells the story of four teenagers through their own subconscious, their short individual first-person chapters recounting their wishes, longings and experiences entirely from their own interpretation of events. Eve, whose home life is chaotic and cruel, uses her body as her only weapon and her source of power, but as a result seems to have retracted into a remoteness from those around her. All except for her best friend, Savita, who is desperate to leave the island, but her undemanding love for Eve and her own reticence prevent her from leaving on her own. Saadiq is a member of the local gang of youths who wield power in the town's slums, but he is also a great reader and writer of poetry and is deeply in love with Eve. Gang member Clélio is the tough one, who the police will pick up at the slightest hint of trouble. His elder brother left Mauritius and went to France, and Clélio still waits for Carlo to send for him, to let him escape.

Jeffrey Zuckerman's empathetic translation retains the poetic essence of Devi's novel, in Part 1 using short, tense sentences to introduce each character, while Part 2 moves them irrevocably to the denouement. Unflinching subject matter, powerfully expressed, offers us an extremely intense, thought-provoking, satisfying read.

Bridget Carrington

Everyone Dies Famous in a Small Town

Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock, pub. Faber

This book is a collection of interlinked short stories about teenagers living in small-town America. The concept seems rather literary and highbrow for children's fiction, but these stories are thoroughly absorbing and authentic (for adults and teens alike) and left with me with a very teenaged sense of ennui and unfulfilled yearning.

There are the simpler stories: a breakup, an imaginary friend, a town's basketball obsession, a girl struggling with anger about her father's new relationship. But there is false sense of security created by living in a small town where everyone knows everyone else. This familiarity can you leave you vulnerable to the darkness and danger lurking beneath the surface—there is also an abusive priest, a missing girl, a wildfire spreading out of control. The narratives overlap and intersect in a cleverly constructed network of relationships, but there are two main arteries that run through the collection, and both are resolved, to some extent, by the end.

Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock has a gift for bringing characters to life with a few deft strokes of the pen, as well as a pitch-perfect ear for teenaged voices. Every walk-on part is so convincingly realised that you wonder what happened to them next, and you hope that they're doing okay. Her prose is sparkingly clear and precise—it's a joy to read.

Everyone Dies Famous in a Small Town is a powerful and moving collection of stories, that bridge the gap between teen and adult fiction. Highly recommended (with a trigger warning for sexual abuse.)

Rebecca Rouillard

Everything I Thought I Knew

Shannon Takaoka, pub. Walker Books

Chloe is 17. She is on track for good grades and she is hoping to attend a top college but then disaster strikes. Chloe collapses during a run and is told that to live she needs a new heart. Everything Chloe knew, everything she thought she knew is about to change, whether or not this is for the better is yet to be determined – possibly by Chloe possibly by you, the reader. We pick up the story again eight months after the transplant. Now Chloe, once the high achiever, finds herself stuck in summer school doing catch up with all those who didn't even consider trying when they had the chance. This is strange to her but there are stranger events about to unfold. Chloe finds herself wishing she was out surfing rather than inside learning. Not so odd you might think, a teenager, the summer, the sea ... however Chloe asks herself 'Why?' "Why do I want to go surfing? – we soon learn why she is asking herself this question – the old Chloe, the before transplant had never even been surfing.

Then comes the recurring nightmare, the motorcycle accident in the tunnel that again Chloe has no recollection of. There is more. There are the people, the places in her memories she has no recollection of. Chloe understandably worries that there may now be something wrong with her head. So begins her search for answers. Of course, no story would be complete without a love interest and so it is that Chloe finds hers. I like this aspect of the story, it stops it from becoming too deep, too philosophical for its intended readership, it fills us with the light of hope. With the love interest and storyline, with Chloe's questions come answers. They may well stop her in her tracks, make her question everything she thought she knew but they leave us with a life-affirming feeling of exhilaration and of the power of story.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

I Know You Did It

Sue Wallman, pub. Scholastic Children's Books

I Know You Did It is a story about Ruby, a teenager who has just moved into a new home and is starting at a new school. She's shown around her new school by Georgia, and Georgia's friend Amber. Everything is going well on her first day as she settles into her new school. Going well that is, until she finds an anonymous, threatening note on her school locker saying "I Know You Did It."

We learn that a terrible event had happened when Ruby was younger - the death of another toddler - and she's felt responsible ever since. Ruby has felt guilty all these years, but she thought she had been the only one who knew. Now though, it transpires that someone else at her new school also knows.

Rumours soon spread around the school like wildfire, and we find Ruby at the centre of attention. It could not have been a worse start to her life at a new school. It is breaking news for the school newspaper, and trends on the school's social media accounts. Soon, Ruby becomes the victim of bullying as well, and although we see her being resilient to the onslaught of abuse, emotionally the bullying takes its toll on her, and as a reader we begin to feel empathy for her plight.

As a narrative, *I Know You Did It* reads in the first person, so we are seeing the story through Ruby's eyes and from her perspective. It is like we, as the readers, are reading her personal diary, and discovering her innermost thoughts and feelings as her new bullies - one by one - also wind up dead. Ruby becomes the prime suspect as she is framed for their murders, and it is up to Ruby to solve the puzzle before it is too late.

In *I Know You Did It* author Sue Wallman has woven together a brilliant page-turner that keeps its readers guessing at every point. While some scenes may be of a sensitive nature to younger readers, it is a gripping story for teenagers, and is well worth a read.

Chris J Kenworthy

The Last Girl

Goldy Moldavsky, pub. Electric Monkey

A teenage obsession with horror movies, bored rich kids and desire to fit in do not make for a quiet, easy life at Manchester Prep. New girl Rachel Chavez tries desperately to navigate the complexities of starting a new school in New York City as a junior, make friends, maintain her grades, as well as overcome some traumatic event that happened in the previous year. Her nurturing mother and new best friend Sandra encourage her to meet new people and make friends. But making new friends is always challenging but particularly so when there is a small group of people intent on revenge. Rachel uncovers first-hand at a party in an abandoned house that nothing is as it seems when a seemingly innocent séance results in her near complete ostracism by the popular Lux and her friends. Rachel's obsession with horror movies as a means of escape and desire to belong collide when she happens upon the Mary Shelley Club. The members of this small, secretive club have two things in common: love of horror movies and a desire to teach bullies or wrong doers the error of their ways. Rachel thinks she has finally found where she belongs. But has she?

The 'tests' that each member of the Club must plan and execute suddenly take on a whole new dimension when it becomes apparent that someone else is intent on foiling their plans. What starts out as teenage pranks quickly become more dangerous with potentially fatal consequences. Events force Rachel to confront her previous terrors and try to uncover who is behind the mask. Completely gripping but the pranks and tactics for revenge seemed trite and somehow less scary than one would have expected given the emphasis on horror movies. It felt like the author was trying to pack too much into the book and didn't fully develop the characters or their intentions as much as one would hope. Still a good book for a rainy day!

Sheri Sticpewich

Raising Hell

Bryony Pearce, pub. UCLan Publishing

Ivy is determined to save young people and prevent them from the potential zombie apocalypse that seems to be on the way. After all, it is partly her fault!

We are taken straight to the crux of this story as soon as we open the book. Ivy and her friends mourn a lost friend and a rift opens which allows dark matter to enter the world. Ivy is left on her own to try and deal with the remnants of that horrifying event and there is only one way which she knows how to do so: with the help of Matilda, her machete. However when a teenager releases two hell hounds in the school corridor however, Ivy's life is thrown, once again, into chaos as she tries to solve the unfolding situation.

Raising Hell is very aptly named! Bryony Pearce structures the story effectively, leading the reader along a journey with many tense moments. Her building of tension throughout chapters leading up to important events is terrific and certainly makes you want to read on to get to the next part. This book would be enjoyed by many young adult readers who are looking for a book which will have them on edge throughout. Those who like gruesome descriptions and action scenes will be thoroughly entertained, and those who are intrigued by black magic along with other dark fantasies will also find this a satisfying read.

The characters in the book are relatable and there is certainly enough of a mix of personal stories for all readers to connect with at some level. The dynamic between Ivy and Nicholas Ortega is the most interesting relationship in the book, taking a while to develop after a very prickly start!

Add to all this the cover illustration, which is fantastic – capturing the book really effectively and really standing out – and you have the perfect mix for a great read.

Tom Joy

Spellhacker

M.K. England, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books

Dizzy is an orphan, her parents dying in the first wave of spellplague: her father never came home, but Dizzy had to watch her mother die. She and her friends now run on the wrong side of the law, siphoning off maz, raw magic that allows people to weave spells. This is going to be their last heist though, before they all separate, leaving Dizzy alone.

Dizzy is not an easy character. She spends much of the story bitter that her friends are leaving, emotionally closed-off and increasingly distant from them as being the only way she knows to deal with the past trauma of losing her family. It is only towards the latter half of the novel that it is possible to be more sympathetic towards her as she reveals more about her past and tries to allow her friends through her personal barricades, allowing the characters to become more complex and more three-dimensional. Dizzy is a computer wizard, creating hardware and breaking into computer systems. Ania, rich kid and techwitch, uses technology so she can manipulate maz, whilst Remi is a natural spellweaver. Jaesin is the muscle. (I am however perplexed by the book's title, *Spellhacker*, presumably describing Dizzy's character, but she uses computer technology, not magic).

There is plenty of action as Dizzy and her friends rapidly rise from small-time operation to Maz Management Corporation (MMC) most wanted, when they siphon-off a previously unknown variant of maz, and after uncovering a much darker corporate secret, are now on a mission to save the world.

There is plenty of subterfuge, using technology and magic to conceal their identities and whereabouts as well as surface and subterranean chases through the city, building to a final showdown with the board of MMC and security personnel deep in the Earth's mantle. The final showdown is a showstopper. The story however often turns swiftly, requiring some suspension of plausibility and continuing reading to enjoy the action.

Be warned, there is a certain amount of swearing in the book, from the start, suggesting an older readership than the characterisation and storyline might satisfy.

Simon Barrett

Tremendous Things

Susin Nielsen, pub. Anderson Press

Tremendous Things is a story about Wilbur. It starts with Wilbur's first day at his new school. For British readers some of the terminology might be confusing at first, as he's starting middle school in the US ninth grade - equivalent to the UK school Year 10 - but the novel soon gives way to its heartwarming plot and the vocabulary embeds in the mind of the reader.

Wilbur's first day couldn't be more embarrassing, though, as a letter is leaked to the entire student body. This is not just any letter but a letter which reveals all of his innermost private feelings. Despite the onslaught of humiliation Wilbur has a best friend Alex who sticks by his side, this is despite the fact that much of Alex's spare time is taken up now that he's dating. As the story progresses Wilbur befriends his elderly neighbour Sal, and this plot development provides the reader with a lesson in friendship itself, and the many different forms those friends can take in real life. We are also given more of an insight into who Wilbur is. He plays triangle in the school band, and then, during a school exchange programme in Paris, he meets Charlie - the girl of his dreams, who plays the ukulele and who steals his heart.

Tremendous Things is a funny, light-hearted teen love story about a dorky kid and his crush on Charlie. It is also a moralistic story for teenagers. The characters' flaws make them seem believable, as though they are real people - and this serves to create the perfect verisimilitude for the story.

Tremendous Things is a quirky story packed full of heart-warming moments that will keep its readers hooked to the book. In this way, the novel is a tremendous triumph for author Susin Nielsen.

Chris J Kenworthy

We Are Inevitable

Gayle Forman, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books

If you were to tell Aaron Stein that it was inevitable he wouldn't be particularly happy. So far the inevitable has not been working out very well for him. He has graduated from high school and he had plans but the plans came to nothing. He saw all his friends leave their small town, go to their chosen

college, move on with their lives while he had to stay behind. Stay behind to help his dad run a failing bookshop. Aaron needs a good kind of inevitable to happen in his life but will it?

He meets again the boy, now almost a man, who made his life a misery at school. The one who bullied him, caused him to lose a girlfriend. Chad is now disabled, in a wheelchair but determined to make right his wrongs and make the best of his life. He finally meets all those lumberjacks he sees everyday on their walk down the high street to the café. They do are determined to make better things of their lives. He meets Hannah, lead singer of a rock band, a girl who makes the most of her everyday and who incidentally loves to read. Can Aaron see beyond his own pessimism, beyond his own worries, beyond the next fateful minute? Can he see the good kind of inevitable that is trying to edge its way into his life and show him that there are answers if he will only take time to listen and not dwell?

Gayle Foreman has done it again, she has written a YA novel that will make you laugh-till-you-cry. It will make you sit up and think. You will want to shout at Aaron to make him see the inevitable. You will want to comfort him because of all the inevitables he sees, and you will journey with him on a journey to finding out more about yourself. A fantastic YA read that I for one found hard to put down.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

We Were Wolves

Jason Cockcroft, pub. Andersen Press

This is about a boy and his relationship with his father. It is a complex relationship and there seems to be a close bond between the two. The boy lives alone in a caravan in the woods. Dad is in prison and promises that he will return soon. The boy calls dad John. The book is very much about the dark secrets that dad has. We know that something dangerous and sinister is going on, but we are left wondering exactly what this is. There is always the threat that something is going to happen. The boy seems vulnerable and yet is able to survive alone. It is a simple novel, yet full of tension. It is told in a tender and loving way, but is scary and haunting at the same time. This all leads to a very unusual and original story. It is quite unsettling, yet it is lovely to read at the same time. It is a very intense and powerful read yet thoughtful and caring.

Danger is always lurking in the background and dark things threaten. A man in a Range Rover turns up at the caravan looking for something. Dad hints at his past and what he is involved in. We do know that he was in the army and is now involved with some very dangerous people. Dad allows his son to be involved in his activities and we are left worrying about the safety and well-being of the boy. Should dad be doing this to his son? There are many unanswered questions. The boy does his best to look out for his dad and at the same time needs to concentrate on his own basic survival.

Several important issues are raised throughout the book. These include poverty, homelessness, loneliness and isolation, crime, and divorce. These issues are covered mainly through the boy and his dad, but mum is also mentioned. The boy seems torn between the two but he remains very loyal to his dad. A young girl appears from the campsite in the next field. She offers some support to the boy and is always there to help and support him.

This is a very different story and an enjoyable read, despite its darkness. The black and white illustrations are a simple and effective addition. They add to a stunning and atmospheric story.

Gary Kenworthy

You're The One That I Want

Simon James Green, pub. Scholastic

Sixth-former, Freddie feels underwhelming, to put it mildly. Students who have spent five years with him at school, have never heard of him. Everybody else seems so sorted, and he just doesn't. After a particularly mortifying experience with Jasper, the 'insanely beautiful' lead in his mother's production of the film, 'Cherries', Freddie vows to change – to work out who he is and what he wants. And so, the Freddie Project is born. With some no-nonsense input from his best friends, Ruby and Sam, the plan takes shape: he has to start saying 'yes' to things, because nothing good can happen when you're scared of everything.

In the fickle world of teenage romance, rife with gossip and smutty humour, Freddie attempts to transform his social and emotional life. He finds his 'yes' to taking part in the school production of *Grease* opens the door to all kinds of opportunities, not least his first relationship. But, riffing off themes in *Grease*, such as innocence and experience, trust and courage, concepts that are inevitable in the search for love, the Freddie Project is a dramatic rollercoaster – in every sense of the word.

You're The One That I Want features a large, vibrant cast of characters, rich in humour and complex emotions. Freddie is gay but that isn't his story. He draws us into his exploration of who he is and can be, and the magnificent possibilities that occur when you stay open to life. The reader is rooting for him, too, in the search for true, reciprocal love. This is a smart, somewhat bawdy, frequently poignant novel for older teenagers of all stripes.

Jackie Spink

Non-Fiction Books

A Little Bit of Courage

Claire Alexander, pub. Happy Yak

The second in Claire Alexander's series about the Ploofers, small balloon-shaped creatures who all like to do the same things together. But there's a problem it seems, because one of them, a very little one, doesn't want to do the same as the others because s/he's afraid. If we've read Alexander's first book, *A Little Bit Different*, we see the Ploofers not understanding why someone might be different, indeed they turn their back on the one who is different, until they understand that it can be good to be different.

In *A Little Bit of Courage* we see a tiny Ploofer who's actually very, very uncertain about doing what all the others are doing. This tiny Ploofer is reluctant to try shoofing (which will certainly engage young readers, as there's quite a resemblance to burping and farting!) when all the others 'shoof' - drift gently upwards on their rainbow coloured ploofs. With sympathetic, understanding and kind encouragement, eventually tiny Ploofer has a try, and readers are comforted by the little bit of courage that a rather curiously shaped Ploofer's help gives the tiny one. BUT, unless we've already read *A Little Bit Different* we don't know who this sympathetic, kind and helpful person is. Now this may not worry the youngest readers, although it is frequently they who point out anomalies which adults often overlook, but the more eagle-eyed adults and children will observe that this Good Samaritan is a curious cello shape rather than the rotund outline of the other Ploofers. You won't find the answer to this, and several other mysteries in the text and illustration (for example, why has one of them got yellow legs, when everyone else is uniformly grey?), unless you have read the first book. While this may be a good wheeze financially for the writer and publisher, it could well be annoying to both adult and child readers who want to know who and why, and have no recourse to the earlier book.

Outshining the sparse text, the rainbow-colour illustrations are attractive, simple and amusing, and far more likely to engage many younger children. In addition readers will be drawn to this magical book by the cover with its cut-out holes showing friendly yellow and orange colours, more of which are revealed as the reader turns the pages.

Bridget Carrington

A Turtle's View of the Ocean Blue

Catherine Barr, illus. Brendan Kearney, pub. Laurence King

Non fiction books could almost be considered works of art and that is especially true of this book.

Visually stunning illustrations immerse the reader in oceans, seas, mangrove forests and seagrass meadows. Journeying between different waterways, the reader meets creatures who make their home there and who we can see in great detail. Many children are familiar with the oceans but perhaps are unfamiliar with kelp forests or estuaries. Reading this, I was fascinated and can only imagine how children will feel while reading this – hopefully the same!

Currents, waves and tides are explained clearly and with fantastic and detailed illustrations making it easier to understand. From the environmental perspective, we know how important our waterways are to life and the vitality of all on the planet and it is essential to educate young readers about how they can help. Catherine Barr, a former Greenpeace campaigner, sets out to inspire a new generation of eco-warriors with her wonderful book. Oceans allow imaginations to take flight as much of our waterways are still largely unexplored due to the depths and breadth of them. We can only imagine what might be lurking in the deepest, darkest depths.

With fantastic use of technical terms and short bursts of text, children can spend more time delving into the illustrations and bouncing between the words.

Erin Hamilton

Ancient World Magnified

David Long, illus. Andy Rowland, pub. Wide-Eyed Books

A search and find educational book that explores ancient and vanished civilizations. Using the magnifying glass provided the reader can find out what life was like in Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, Ancient Egypt, the time of the Olmec in Mexico, Carthage, the Kingdom of Kush, Babylonia, Persia, Ancient Greece, the Qin Dynasty, the Xiongnu Empire, the Parthian Empire, Ancient Rome, the Kingdom of Aksum, the time of the Mayans and Aztecs!

Covering a time period from 50,000 BCE to 1206 CE the book travels through time informing and entertaining. Each civilization is given a dedicated two-page spread filled with an incredibly detailed illustration. There's some basic information about the historical period and a list of ten things to spot with descriptions and explanations about these hidden details but don't be fooled, there's a lot more to discover on each page and you could spend hours poring over the pictures.

As if that's not enough, there's a page with extra 58 items to spot as well. The gallery of famous figures – one from each time period – is interesting and the timeline puts everything into perspective. Most useful is the answers page where a small copy of each illustration has the 10 items ringed.

If you love the *Where's Wally* type of hidden picture book then you'll love this – the latest edition in the series, the others being: *Pirates Magnified*, *Egypt Magnified* and *Castles Magnified*.

Barbara Band

Atlas of Amazing Architecture: The Most Incredible Buildings You've (Probably) Never Heard Of

Peter Allen, pub. Cicada Books

As expected from the title, this book looks at an eclectic mix of structures avoiding the obvious covered by other books; for example, there's no pyramids at Giza, instead the reader is introduced to the Meroc Pyramids in Sudan, built a thousand years later. The book is arranged in chronological

order covering historical and contemporary works from Neolithic monuments in Northern Europe, built in 4000 BCE, to the SGAE headquarters in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, constructed in 2008. The buildings span all continents and each is visually striking and significant for introducing a new technology or defining an architectural movement, with most recognised by UNESCO or another agency. Each structure is given a double page spread, the illustrations are bright and visually appealing with details that bring the building alive, and there are small paragraphs of text with information about why the building has been included in the book, why it was built and points of particular interest. For example, we learn that legend says that Master Nestor, the lead builder of Kizhi Pogost, a wooden religious structure that stands on an island in the centre of Lake Onega in northern Russia, is said to have used a single axe and thrown it into the lake on completion of the buildings. There are pages devoted to World Fairs, Hideaways and airport architecture. Finally, a glossary of architectural terms and an index complete this fascinating book.

Barbara Band

Dancing Birds and Singing Apes

Smriti Prasadam-Halls, illus. Florence Weiser, pub. Wren and Rook

What a delightful look at the courting habits of a variety of creatures around the world. From birds of paradise and bowerbirds to koalas and flamingos, we see the many ways that animals try to attract each other and show affection.

This is a non fiction book yet it reads like a picture book. It is a book that is packed full of information about the natural world, all of which will fascinate and draw in the young reader. Its format makes it highly readable and very attractive too.

The author has chosen a wide range of animals from differing environments all of which will create talking points for the reader. She shows how they adapt to their surroundings, both with their rituals and with the homes they produce, again talking points are created. The illustrations are full of colour and energy and bring character to all of the creatures introduced. The use of double page spreads for many of the subjects really gives an opportunity for the reader to get a sense of the environment and the behaviours of the animals.

This will make a great addition to both nursery and KS1 book collections, both as a good read and for topic research at school and home.

Margaret Pemberton

Danny Dodo's Detective Diary

Rachel Eliot, animal expert Dr Nick Crumpton, illus. Rob Hodgson, pub. Thames and Hudson

Most of us know all about the extinction of the dodo bird, the dinosaurs and creatures such as the sabre tooth tiger but this book is full of fascinating creatures you maybe haven't heard (or read) before. *Danny Dodo's Detective Diary* highlights the animals that are currently classed as Vulnerable, Endangered or Extinct. It also sets out to provide reasons for these losses to the natural world and

allows the reader time to think about how humans have affected the habitats and food chains of these animals over time.

Brilliantly illustrated, this book is full of colour and details that show us exactly what the animals look like, their homes and behaviours. With short bursts of important facts and text, readers can immerse themselves in the illustrations to fully understand where and when these animals existed. Written in the first person, like a case file, from the perspective of Danny Dodo, Detective, it feels almost like we are invited to help solve the mystery of each classification from vulnerable to extinct. Each double page spread features one animal or group and Danny shares as much information as he has about these, some of them dating back to 11,000 BCE.

On the last few pages, readers are given some ideas of ways they can help. This is an all-important feature of many non-fiction books now - demonstrating ways readers can get involved to help save the planet. From simple solutions of reduce, reuse and recycle to finding your voice, all children should take away some helpful tips and fascinating facts about creatures from history and today.

Erin Hamilton

Do Animals Fall in Love?

Katharina von der Gathen, illus. Anke Kuhl, pub. Gecko Press

While we sleep at night frogs come life. To attract a female the male frogs croak with all their might, creating a chorus of different notes. They use their vocal sacs to create the noise, the bigger the sac - the louder the noise, and the more females they are likely to attract. Male Flamingos gather for a group dance when they want to impress the females. To attract a female the male Toadfish is especially vocal. Underwater they are able to buzz the most beautiful love song, they can spend hours underwater droning and humming. This is an especially beautiful sound when a group of males do it at the same time. Then of course there are the animals that will fight for the chance to mate, an example of this would be male Kangaroos. They will box, wrestle and fight for the right to mate.

After all this work comes the actual mating. Stick Insects can mate for as long as 6 weeks at a time whilst the scorpion mates when dancing - they will hold on to each other's pincers and dance.

These are just some examples of the behaviour exhibited in the animal kingdom, there are plenty more that I haven't included. The book goes into great detail, and the illustrations accompanying the facts are beautifully drawn with amazing detail.

I really liked this book and found it to be fascinating reading. Some of the facts I already knew, but much of it was new to me and I am quite certain will be to its intended audience of children too. This will be a delightful addition to my, and I hope your, school library.

Helen Byles

The Encyclopaedia of Unbelievable Facts

Jane Wilsher, illus. Louise Lockhart, pub. Quarto Kids

The Encyclopaedia of Unbelievable Facts is written using the format of 500 questions and answers covering ten sections including: Human Body; Science and Tech; Animals; Natural World; History; Customs and Cultures; Our World; Arts and Entertainment; and Mindbending Stuff.

I must admit I was immediately intrigued and drawn to the latter section ... potentially fascinating! With a small glossary for the more unusual words, a useful index, and a very helpful introduction explaining that there's no right or wrong way to read the book – the book is packed with a range excellent advice before you have reached the facts. I'm not sure I really wanted to learn that my nose makes almost seven teacups of mucus a day, most of which ends up in the stomach, but the world's favourite colour was rather surprising (it's bluey-green if you want to know).

This is a large format book with clear and accessible font broken up by delightful hand-drawn illustrations. Some of the questions – and answers – are simple and straightforward, such as 'What is the world's longest river?' Others range from being fascinating, odd, bizarre to simply mind-boggling. Regardless, they will entertain and inform. Although aimed at children aged 7 – 9 years old the book could be used, with adult help, with younger children and is likely to even tempt older KS2 students. Perfect for those children who like to dip into books and read aloud the facts they've discovered.

Barbara Band

Imagine You Were There: Walking on the Moon

Caryn Jenner, illus. Marc Pattenden, pub. Kingfisher

One of the greatest accomplishments of the human race, landing on the Moon, is explored wonderfully well in *Imagine You Were There: Walking on the Moon*. The book carries you on a journey through preparing to land on the Moon to returning to Earth in a step-by-step fashion that makes it easy for any reader to follow.

This terrific book is well-presented and informative. It is separated into well thought-out sections, with brilliantly laid out double page spreads that include paragraphs of writing mixed in with diagrams and photos that help capture the excitement from the actual 1969 landings. With subtle references to other events and news of 'A Changing World', it will help younger readers to form connections with a part of a timeline that they may less familiar with.

What is truly impressive about this book is the way that it acknowledges a variety of the different roles involved with the first Moon landing rather than simply focusing on the astronauts themselves; we find out about the lesser-known heroes of the team, including the likes of Eleanor Foraker, a seamstress who helped to make the spacesuits, and Katherine Johnson, a 'human computer' who helped to calculate the speed of the spacecraft and its necessary trajectory amongst other things.

Children interested in space will adore this book - with its insights into take-off and the work at Mission Control as well as diagrams of the Apollo 11 vehicles and the different stages of the Moon landing, this really does cover all areas of interest for those who have the desire to know more about what it takes to fly to the Moon!

Tom Joy

Invented by Animals: Meet the Creatures who inspired our Everyday Technology

Christiane Dorion, illus. Gosia Herba, pub. Wide Eyed Editions

Invented by Animals looks at the animal characteristics and behaviours that have inspired humans to solve tricky problems or improve existing inventions. Twenty-eight animals are featured, many of which will be familiar to the reader. These include spiders, penguins, jellyfish and slugs, and there are also pages covering master builders, the art of flying, and robot world – a look at tiny creatures that have inspired robotics.

Each of the animals is presented on a double page spread with the colourful and fun illustrations taking centre stage. The text is generally in four clear blocks and is written in the first person, making it more relatable for children. We discover where the animal lives and the property it has that makes it unusual or interesting. This means we learn facts such as a shark's skin has led to the development of high tech swimsuits and coatings for ships; the earwig's wings were the inspiration for origami folding wings for satellites; whale flippers have helped create bumpy blades for wind turbines; and porcupine quills resulted in wound-closing staples. Fascinating stuff – all taken from nature!

Most children are interested in animals and this book would be great for them to dip in to. It's fascinating and educational, the animals featured are varied and there are plenty of 'wow, I didn't know that' moments to enjoy!

Barbara Band

Nano: The Spectacular Science of the Very (Very) Small

Dr. Jess Wade, illus. Melissa Castrillon, pub. Walker Books

This is an exciting science book about materials. It is a non-fiction picture book which introduces young readers to the fascinating science of the very small. The title explains clearly that this is the spectacular science of the very, very small. This is nanotechnology. It is an exciting book which makes a complex subject more easily understandable. It is very informative, leaving young people wanting more and is the perfect book for budding young scientists.

It is presented using simple language for young people to grasp and will encourage young readers to be even more curious about science. It makes science exciting and fun to learn. As well as exciting young people, older readers will also learn from it. In fact, it should prove enjoyable and educational for the whole family. It brings some very complex science to life.

This book introduces some interesting and unusual stuff. It is about the world of atoms and materials. Everything in your home is made from something. It could be light or heavy, strong or bendy, smooth or rough. A wide range of vocabulary is introduced through these concepts. This vocabulary is explained through simple to understand statements and observations. For example, readers are told

that the book is made from paper. Stone would be too heavy, and glass would be too delicate. Imagine a book made from chocolate.

The text is written by top scientist Dr. Jess Wade and is brought to life by the brilliant and dynamic illustrations by Melissa Castrillon. At the end there is an exciting glimpse into the future and there are fascinating paragraphs on chemists, physicists, engineers, microscopes and spectroscopy. There is also a concise and useful index. This is a very accessible text complimented by simple and beautifully shaded pictures. This is a perfect science book for inquisitive minds eager to learn about something that they may not yet fully understand.

Gary Kenworthy

Once Upon a Mermaid's Tail

Beatrice Blue, pub. Frances Lincoln

Once upon a Mermaid's Tail is part of what could be described as a non-fiction picture book series (including *Once upon a Unicorn Horn* and *Once upon a Dragon's Fire*) explaining how magical creatures get their distinguishing features and gifts. This is the story of how mermaids got their tails...

Theodore loves to go out on the magic lagoon in his boat and collect fish. His whole house is full of fish tanks and wonderful fish of all colours and sizes. But one day he finds the most beautiful creature he's ever seen. The ocean warns him to leave her where he found her, but Theodore doesn't listen and can't resist taking her home. He adds her to his collection and decides to call her Oceanne. But Oceanne is not suited to captivity and becomes dangerously ill. Theodore takes her back to the lagoon, but she doesn't wake up until all the fish give her some colourful scales to create a tail and she transforms into a beautiful mermaid. Theodore learns that fish (and mermaids) are better off in the ocean where they are free.

Beatrice Blue's vivid and lively illustrations of the ocean are a delight, and the images and text are beautifully integrated. The mermaid, Oceanne, has a slightly Manga/My Little Pony look about her that will definitely have an appeal to younger children, and of course the shiny foil details on the cover add an additional sparkle.

Once upon a Mermaid's Tail is a gentle fable about respecting wildlife and protecting our oceans and inspires a sense of wonder at the magic of the natural world. And who can resist a mermaid?

Rebecca Rouillard

Once Upon a Rhythm

James Carter, illus. Valerio Vidali, pub. Little Tiger

Once Upon a Rhythm starts as it means to go on, with a great big boom! This most delightful ode to music takes us on a journey from the very beginnings of musical traditions – did you know that this was 40,000 years ago - right up to modern day jangles and twangs. It beautifully conveys how music is within all of us, and that it is an innately human thing. It teaches us, through the use of pleasing

rhymes, how music has developed over all these many years. We learn about instruments, songs, musical notation, and all sorts of different styles of music from around the globe. Fascinating and a very clever approach.

This book provides the reader with a clever overview of music history which would serve well as an introduction for older children. It offers us poetry rather than detailed facts, but it provides useful inspiration for jumping off into deeper exploration of different musical topics. The language is simple, with some lovely sounds and onomatopoeia to illuminate the facts. The illustrations all help in building to a climax, and the most important message of all - that we are all musicians. This is a real celebration of music that begs to be read aloud.

Lucy Hollins

Protest!

Alice and Emily Howarth-Booth, illus. Emily Howarth-Booth, pub. Pavilion Children's Books

Ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things. That is the message at the heart of this brilliant book, which takes us on a grand exploration of people who have united for the greater good throughout human history.

It starts with the first ever workers strike in ancient Egypt. This strike, we learn, took place in 1170 BCE when medieval peasants revolted against an unpopular Countess. We are then taken on a journey through history that brings us right up to the present day, and school children striking to bring attention to the climate crisis. On the way we learn about all sorts of innovative and creative ways of protesting: theatrical interventions, playing bad music, and taking your TV for a walk, to name but a few. We learn how these acts have shaken society, forged friendships, and created communities.

Jam-packed full of information and inspiration, no stone is left unturned. The book covers all the events one might expect to read about in a historical work, and takes us into many other, wonderful but less familiar worlds too. Beautifully designed, with wonderful illustrations to bring each topic to life, this book is pitched perfectly. It is eminently accessible and will be interesting and thought-provoking for adults as well as younger readers. It is a positive and uplifting celebration of people who have worked together to make the world a better place.

Lucy Hollins

Think About It! Philosophy for Kids: Key Ideas Clearly Explained

Alex Woolf, illus. Jack Oliver Coles, pub. Arcturus Publishing

Alex Woolf's *Philosophy for Kids* is a great introduction to philosophy, supporting learning and an interest in philosophy at both KS2 and KS3.

The book is logically structured. The introduction considers what is philosophy, linguistically rooting it in its meaning 'the love of wisdom.' The opening chapter then examines epistemology, what is knowledge and how can we know anything, before investigating existence itself: does the universe and

other things in it, like you and I, exist. The book continues to look at the fundamentals of time and space, before exploring in the following chapters more human-centred questions, beginning with the philosophy of mind and central questions of mind and body, thinking and identity. There is a chapter on morality, what is wrong and right and finally, and more unusually a chapter about power: the relationship between rulers, citizens and justice. There are questions therefore for everyone to explore, and perhaps this is the best way to read the book by simply picking a topic of interest.

One of the strengths of *Philosophy for Kids*, as it is subtitled, is the clarity of the explanation of key ideas. There is a clearly explained progression of thought, even in the more abstract and difficult philosophical concepts. This is exemplified in the section on identity using the same thought experiment of teleporting Oliver to Mars and back, effectively creating a duplicate of Oliver and discarding the original body, to reflect on who we really are. It continues with Oliver becoming a giant fly on Mars, but with Oliver's mind and finally Oliver's body, but without any of his memories. This highlights how Alex Woolf has also selected a number of examples to explain philosophical concepts that children can relate to and will engage with. In addition, the text is supported by Jack Oliver Coles' illustrations, showing key concepts and possible scenarios of philosophical interest.

Simon Barrett

Picture books

The Boy and the Sea

Camille Andros, illus. Amy Bates

Georgie Grows A Dragon

Emma Lazell

Grandma's House of Rules

Henry Blackshaw

Grandpa Across the Ocean

Hyewon Yum

Home of the Wild

Louise Grieg, illus. Júlia Moscardó

The Hugasaurus

Rachel Bright, illus. Chris Chatterton

I'm Not (very) Afraid of Being Alone

Anna Milbourne, illus. Sandra de la Prada

Just Being Ted

Lisa Sheehan

The Little Things: A Story About Acts of Kindness

Christian Trimmer, illus. Kaylani Juanita

My Dad is a Grizzly Bear

Swapna Haddow, illus. Dapo Adeola

Pear of Hope

Wenda Shurety, illus. Deb Hudson

Peep

Meg McLaren

Rain Before Rainbows

Smriti Hall, illus. David Litchfield

Sometimes: A Book of Feelings

Stephanie Stansbie, illus. Elisa Paganelli

The Whale Who Wanted More

Rachel Bright, illus. Jim Field

Junior books

A Glasshouse of Stars

Shirley Marr

An Alien In The Jam Factory

Chrissie Sains, illus. Jenny Taylor

Antigua de Fortune of the High Seas

Anna Rainbow and Oli Hyatt, illus. Steve Wells

Bad Panda

Swapna Haddow, illus. Sheena Dempsey

The Chessmen Thief

Barbara Henderson, illus. Sandra McGowan

Harklights

Tim Tilley

How to Make a Pet Monster: Hodgepodge

Lili Wilkinson, illus. Dustin Spence

Kate on the Case

Hannah Peck

The Lightning Catcher

Clare Weze

Melt

Ele Fountain

The Nightsilver Promise

Annaliese Avery

Philosophy Resistance Squad

Robert Grant

Rise of the Shadow Dragons

Liz Flanagan

Secrets of a Schoolyard Millionaire

Nat Amore

Twitch

M. G. Leonard

Young Adult books

A Constellation of Roses

Miranda Asebedo

A Gathering Midnight

Holly Race

Ace of Spades

Faridah Abike-Iyimide

Bone Music

David Almond

Eve Out of Her Ruins

Ananda Devi, trans. Jeffrey Zuckerman

Everyone Dies Famous in a Small Town

Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock

Everything I Thought I Knew

Shannon Takaoka

I Know You Did It

Sue Wallman

The Last Girl

Goldy Moldavsky

Raising Hell

Bryony Pearce

Spellhacker

M.K. England

Tremendous Things

Susin Nielsen

We Are Inevitable

Gayle Forman

We Were Wolves

Jason Cockcroft

You're The One That I Want

Simon James Green

Non-Fiction books

A Little Bit of Courage

Claire Alexander

A Turtle's View of the Ocean Blue

Catherine Barr, illus. Brendan Kearney

Ancient World Magnified

David Long, illus. Andy Rowland

Atlas of Amazing Architecture: The Most Incredible Buildings You've (Probably) Never Heard Of

Peter Allen

Dancing Birds and Singing Apes

Smriti Prasad-Halls, illus. Florence Weiser

Danny Dodo's Detective Diary

Rachel Eliot, animal expert Dr Nick Crumpton, illus. Rob Hodgson

Do Animals Fall in Love?

Katharina von der Gathen, illus. Anke Kuhl

The Encyclopaedia of Unbelievable Facts

Jane Wilsher, illus. Louise Lockhart

Imagine You Were There: Walking on the Moon

Caryn Jenner, illus. Marc Pattenden

Invented by Animals: Meet the Creatures who inspired our Everyday Technology

Christiane Dorion, illus. Gosia Herba

Nano: The Spectacular Science of the Very (Very) Small

Dr. Jess Wade, illus. Melissa Castrillon

Once Upon a Mermaid's Tail

Beatrice Blue

Once Upon a Rhythm

James Carter, illus. Valerio Vidali

Protest!

Alice and Emily Howarth-Booth, illus. Emily Howarth-Booth

Think About It! Philosophy for Kids: Key Ideas Clearly Explained

Alex Woolf, illus. Jack Oliver Coles