



Armadillo

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

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Picture Book Reviews

A Dragon on the Roof: A Children's Book Inspired by Antoni Gaudí

Cécile Alix, illus. Fred Sochard, pub. Prestel Children's Books

Paloma might just be the bravest girl that ever lived. As her nanny dozes, she decides to take on a dragon! Together with her little bat friend, Paloma chases the dragon through her house as he tries to gobble up everything in his wake. Unafraid of being devoured, when she finds him she gives him a stroke (doesn't she know dragons are ticklish?). The dragon explodes with laughter and unleashes the sea, complete with waves, crabs and even a seahorse! Her home being turned into a giant aquarium doesn't stop our brave heroine and when she finds the interloper on the roof, she gives him a piece of her mind. Finding out that all the dragon wants is somewhere to sleep, Paloma eventually settles him on the roof. Her house will never be the same...

Set in Casa Batlló, one of Antoni Gaudí's most celebrated buildings, each step of Cécile Alix's quirky story introduces the reader to an element of the house's architecture; a stairway that twists like an animal's spine; elephant shaped columns; tiles like fish scales and a dragon on the roof! Fred Sochard beautifully illustrates the story with pictures that are bold, colourful and full of joy and wonder – just like the house that inspired them.

This is a book unlike anything I've read before. Alix and Sochard bring Gaudí's exuberant, work to life in a way that is just perfect for younger readers. At the end of the book there is information about Gaudí's life as well as details about what inspired the author and illustrator. This is a fantastic introduction to Gaudí and a wonderful picture book - I highly recommend it!

Abby Mellor

The Adventures of Moose & Mr Brown

Paul Smith, illus. Sam Usher, pub. Pavilion Books

In a chance meeting, Mr Brown, an international fashion designer, and Moose, a visitor from Alaska with an eye for fashion, become fast friends. But Moose has been separated from his twin brother, Monty. The two decide to travel the world to look for Monty and are inspired to help the animals they meet in each country with inventive new apparel – parkas for penguins and scarves for giraffes to name just two. Eventually they end up back in the fashion capital of the world, and what a surprise they have waiting for them at Mr Brown's fashion show in Paris.

From the moment I glanced at the bright orange cover, debossed title text and shiny foil stamped details, I knew this book was something special. Then I noticed that the author was none other than Sir Paul Smith. Yes, that Paul Smith. With illustrations by the renowned Sam Usher, this gorgeously designed picture book is truly a feast for the eyes. Readers will recognize Paul Smith's iconic, colourful designs lurking in the details on each page. From a striped phone to flower-patterned dungarees and a bright, happy colour palette, there is no doubt that this is a Paul Smith creation expertly crafted by a talented illustrator.

Readers follow the design duo of Mr Brown and Moose around the world as they meet and are inspired by a wonderful array of animals. While their ever-changing environment inspires the designers, it's the designers who in turn provide thoughtful (and colourful) solutions to their animal friends. A skunk is chuffed with his perfumed pants. Go-faster slippers are just the thing for too-slow sloths. And panda has never seen so clearly since Mr Brown designed a stylish pair of red specs.

This fun story full of imagination and inspiration is packed full of images for both little and big eyes to devour. The pages illustrating the office of Mr Brown are especially enticing with bright bits and bobs covering the spread. It offers a little peek into the real world of design that is sure to mesmerise readers.

The Adventures of Moose & Mr Brown is an entertaining romp around the world – both the animal world and the world of fashion. A mashup of colours, kindness and comradery all wrapped up in the unmistakable style of Paul Smith.

Stephanie Ward

Be More Bernard

Simon Philip, illus. Kate Hindley, pub. Simon & Schuster

Bernard isn't like all the other rabbits in his warren: his dreams don't involve carrots, he doesn't enjoy eating lots of lettuce, and he draws the line at bunny poo baps. (Some explanation on the eating habits of rabbits may be necessary to explain this last item!) He enjoys being different from all the other dungaree-clad builder rabbits; he hops when they bounce, and bounces when they hop. Then he starts sneaking out at night with his huge radio, practising roller dancing. He reveals his new talent at the Bunny Ball, jiving, grooving and glittering, and most of the other rabbits are shocked, as they think they should all be the same, but Betsy likes it, because it is different. Betsy joins in, and gradually more rabbits dance differently in their own ways. Finally, Bernard asks if they all really dream of carrots, and of course they don't- they dream of all sorts of things. So, even though in some ways they are all the same, they can all agree that "being yourself is the best thing a bunny can be".

Both author and illustrator are experienced in the world of picture books, and previously collaborated on “You must bring a hat”. Kate Hindley’s quirky illustrations are very expressive, and the story is fun, so this is likely to be popular for sharing, and for young readers.

Diana Barnes

The Child of Dreams

Irena Brignull, illus. Richard Jones, pub. Walker Books

The protagonist of this poignant tale, ‘a young girl with bluebell eyes and hair that shone like chestnuts’, lives alone with her mother in the countryside but she observes that all the animals have two parents. She asks her mother where she came from and her mother tries to explain how she was created from her dreams, but the girl doesn’t understand. She embarks on a long journey to trace where exactly she came from. She travels through the woods, up the river and over the hills, guided by the animals who brought her to her mother in the first place. Eventually a fox takes her to the orphanage where she was abandoned, and she speaks to a young boy who is still waiting to be found. Finally, she understands that it is better to have been found than to know exactly where she came from, and she returns to her mother’s arms.

Richard Jones’ illustrations are achingly beautiful, and the layered, textured images and autumnal palette perfectly complement the lyrical narrative. The setting is an homage to nature and the outdoor lifestyle but the portrayal of the wonderful relationship between the mother and the daughter is the warm heart of this book.

The Child of Dreams could be a helpful metaphor or a guide to start up a conversation with a child about adoption or about having a single parent. It could also be enjoyed purely as a story, though the issues raised are quite complex and might be upsetting for a younger child. Overall, an incredibly moving, gorgeously illustrated tale about the love between parent and child—highly recommended.

Rebecca Rouillard

Fair Shares

Pippa Goodhart, illus. Anna Doherty, pub. Tiny Owl

Bear and Hare are trying to reach a tree of pears. They both want to eat some of the juicy fruit. Neither can reach the pears. Hare comes up with a solution. They can stand on chairs. There are three chairs available. Hare gives one to Bear and takes two for himself. Bear objects that this is not fair.

The message of the book, an important message for early readers between the ages of 4 and 7, is that fair and equal are not always the same thing. Bear and Hare finally reach the pears. When they have

picked the pears they meet Beetle. They offer him a pear. Beetle does not like eating pears. But he does like eating chairs. It is, says the book, OK to be different.

Anna Doherty's illustrations are bright and expressive. The autumnal colour tones are glorious.

Rebecca Butler

Free

Sam Usher, pub. Templar Books

One morning a boy wakes up to find a poorly bird on his windowsill. His grandad helps him to give the bird some water and it recovers fast, but then it doesn't want to leave. The boy and his grandad go about their normal day, but the bird keeps returning. Eventually they decided to go on an expedition to a special tree at the top of a mountain to return the bird to his natural habitat. They make it to the tree, the bird is reunited with his friends, and all the birds sing to the boy and his grandad. The story slips into the realm of the imagination, the boy and his grandad sit at the top of the tree with all the birds, having a midnight feast of giant fruit, and then fly back down the mountain again, escorted by all the birds.

Sam Usher's cheerful illustrations are full of enticing details, but the high point is a brilliantly chaotic image of the tree cloaked in a multitude of vividly coloured birds, all singing together.

Free is a sunny and touching story about the relationship between a boy and his grandad. It has many of the elements of a traditional, Shirley Hughes-style picture book, with the additional of some bright sparks of colour and imagination. *Free* is a charming picture book, suitable for all ages.

Rebecca Rouillard

The Girl and the Dinosaur

Hollie Hughes, illus. Sarah Massini, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

In a town not far from here, a little girl named Marianne is digging for a dinosaur. Beside the sea, she patiently digs in the sand and, eventually, begins to uncover her new friend 'stony bone by stony bone'. As she falls asleep that night, she sends a special wish into the starry sky; she hopes for her new dinosaur friend to come to life and come find her.

In a world that is thick with dreams, Marianne's dinosaur wakes from his slumber and her wish comes true. Through sea and magical forests, past giants, unicorns and fairies, together the two friends journey to a moonlit island where 'anything is possible and nothing's as it seems'.

Hollie Hughes is a master story-teller. Her gentle rhyme captivated us from the first page as it transported us through the pages of this enchanting tale. It's so gorgeously written, the words themselves feel like magic. Massini's exquisite illustrations in muted tones add to the whimsical, dreamlike feel.

This beautiful story is a celebration of childhood imagination. A special find to be shared and treasured; read it and you will be transported to a dream world where anything is possible.

Abby Mellor

The Golden Cage or The True Story of the Blood Princess

Anna Castagnoli, illus. Carll Cneut, trans. Laura Watkinson, pub. Book Island

This beautifully produced unusual picture book is a dark mysterious otherworldly fairy tale following in the footsteps of the Grimm Brothers. First published in Europe in 2014 with an Italian author and renowned award-winning Belgian illustrator it has taken a while to get to British readers but with an English translator, here it is. Various reviewers have implied that the reason for the delay is the unsettling content at its heart; however, I think it sits neatly alongside the works of Carroll or Dahl.

Valentina is the ten-year-old Emperor's daughter and we are immediately told she is "a nightmare"; she is spoilt, unhappy, owns 390 pairs of shoes, 812 hats and 50 snakeskin belts but her most beloved belongings are the birds and the 101 very large birdcages that they inhabit. Valentina has a castle brimming with servants who she dispatches across the globe to find and retrieve rare and exotic birds for her to put into the cages. However, Valentina often invents these unusual birds and so when the servants return with the closest specimen they can find to her unrealistic demands she keeps the birds but beheads the servants. Like Carroll's Queen of Hearts her bloodthirst knows no bounds and skulls are scattered around the castle and its grounds. She even sits on piles of them as she instructs her remaining terrified staff and just as "off with their heads" is heard all around Wonderland "CHOP" echoes around Valentina's world.

One night Valentina dreams of a talking bird who "was such good company ... saying such sweet things, and saying them only to her" that she orders the servants to find it for her to place inside her most special birdcage, the golden one that her father had given to her for her birthday. Valentina is depicted as being a sullen, lonely, miserable child and her desperation for this imaginary bird amplifies this. She needs somebody to talk to and it is no coincidence that the bird of her dreams is remarkably similar to the soft toy she is seen holding. As the months and seasons go by she beheads an average of 100 servants a month but nobody can find a true talking bird, just birds that pale in comparison due to their ability to just repeat the same old things.

Her unhindered murderous frustration leads to “the palace [becoming] the colour of blood” hence the book’s subtitle and results in her selling her possessions including her birds and the castle becoming a ruin. That is until one day, an unknown servant boy approaches her saying he can resolve her seemingly impossible quest but only if she promises to not chop anybody’s head off again and be patient. Valentina unhappily agrees and after waiting eleven months she is presented with an egg. She waits so long for the egg to hatch that her hair grows from a scruffy bob into very long wild tendrils that stretch across the floor like the branches and roots of the trees surrounding her.

Then quite abruptly, so much so that I was jolted out of Valentina’s world, there is a sudden gear change. The final two pages are just writing, the longest block of words within the book, and there are no images at all. Additionally, the narrator is talking directly to the reader, saying that the story is a true one but never has it had the same ending each time it is told and gives three different versions they have heard. Each one implies Valentina never got her talking bird but nothing else. On one hand I felt this ending was a shame as it sort of felt like the author wasn’t quite sure how to resolve the story but on the other hand I felt that it fits within the fairy tale style and builds on the sense of uncertainty garnered throughout. It also opens up class discussions on who the narrator is, how true is the story, and what did happen to Valentina.

There is so much to talk about regarding this large size picture book, that it is impossible to mention everything here. I have so many notes jotted down of things that occurred to me that this review could easily be double the length it is!

However, the illustrations must be mentioned for their exquisite vibrancy and rich detail, you can get lost in them quite easily, especially as there are numerous pages that are just Cneut’s work. This is one reason why I felt the sudden change in direction at the end so sharply. The images of the birds reminded me of historical ornithological illustrations and those in the palace have an absurdity and creepiness about them that you can’t help but be absorbed by them. There is also a resemblance to John Tenniel with the uncanny nature of Cneut’s style.

This is not so much a cautionary fairy tale with a nice moral but I think one that purposely puts you on edge and unbalances you by transporting you into an enigmatic world with a petulant complicated lonely child at its centre. As cautioned by those reviewers I mentioned earlier, the macabre nature of the story may need to be considered but this is a brilliant book for sophisticated readers who want a challenge or as a class read and a perfect contemporary story to study alongside more traditional ones in the fairy tale canon.

Natalie McChrystal Plimmer

The Hairdo that Got Away

Joseph Coelho, illus. Fiona Lumbers, pub. Andersen Press

This is a wonderful story about a young boy and what happens when he doesn't get his haircut. Every month he goes to the barber's with his father, but then his father disappears from the family home and things start to fall apart. The situation becomes so bad that he is no longer recognizable and his behavior starts to suffer. After many months his father re-appears and as a sign of reconciliation the whole family goes off to get their hair cut.

From one perspective this is a very simple story about hair, but of course there is a greater depth to this story; we are actually being shown the potential breakdown of a family and how tangled lives and emotions can become when they are not looked after. In the story we see that the irritation caused by the long hair is a reflection of the hurt and anger that the child feels over his missing father; even his mother cannot help because her hair is also growing and prevents her hearing her son's concerns.

This is a very thought provoking book that can be read both as a good read but also as a story to encourage empathy and questioning.

Margaret Pemberton

Herring Hotel

Didier Levy, illus. Serge Bloch, pub. Thames & Hudson

First published in France, *Herring Hotel*, written by French author Didier Levy and illustrated by Serge Bloch is set in a grand old hotel full of quirky characters. The Herring Hotel, once known as the Sherrington Hotel (until some of the letters fell off) is home to Gabriel and his Mum and Dad. There are holes in the roof where the rain pours in and bits of the old building fall off from time to time, but Gabriel loves it and Mum and Dad are very good at looking after their strange guests.

Gabriel tells us how he takes tea and coffee to all of the guests in the breakfast room each morning before going to school – and in doing so introduces us to the guests themselves, most of whom have been living there for years. Each of the guests is a little stranger than the last, but the strangest of all is Mrs Kettle, who tells young Gabriel that she is really 'Tina the 23rd, exiled Queen of Kettlippia', and rewards his services with chocolate medals. She tells Gabriel how her country was invaded and she was forced into exile. He loves hearing her stories but his parents warn him that, even though they too like Mrs Kettle, he shouldn't always believe what she tells him as she's 'a little bit crazy.'

When the Herring Hotel falls apart and Gabriel, his parents and all the guests are all left with nowhere to live they are sad thinking that they will all have to say goodbye to each other. At the last moment, a long line of cars appear carrying the people of Kettlippia – come to take their queen back home. The remains of the hotel are carried back and the hotel is rebuilt next to the Queen's Palace where they all live happily ever after.

A very different, quirky picture book for older children to enjoy. In the classroom children could have lots of fun creating their own hotel and filling it with their own odd and unusual characters.

Vicky Harvey

It's a No Money Day

Kate Milner, pub. Barrington Stoke

The book tells the story of a little girl who lives with her mum. Mum works really hard but they never have enough money. One day mum goes to the cupboard only to find it empty so is forced to visit the food bank, mum is ashamed of this. The little girl enjoys the simple things in life a visit to the local library, a shopping trip to the charity shop, playing dressing up, pretending mum's dressing gown is the kitten she's always wanted. She even enjoys a trip to the local food bank. She is always happy. Maybe one day things will be brighter for them but now they make the best of what they have got.

This is a beautifully written and thought provoking story, a story that every adult and child should read. *It's a No Money Day* is a powerful, poignant story about life below the poverty line in Britain, and shows the sad rise in the use of food banks.

The illustrations are beautifully drawn and simply done and even without any words I believe the reader would be able to understand the story. The book is a nice size and ideal for little hands. This is one of my favourite books of the year, it is perfect for children of all ages, and I think it's important for all children to understand how other people live and that not everyone is lucky enough to be able to afford basics such as food. It's also important to see that you don't need money to be happy, some of the best things in life can be free.

Helen Byles

The King and the Gifts of Gold

Georg Dreissig, illus. Maren Briswalter, pub. Floris Books

The King and the Gifts of Gold re-imagines the story of King Melchoir, one of the three wise men of the nativity story, following his journey onwards after his gift of gold to baby Jesus.

Melchoir is known as the King of Gold, because he is so rich. But after seeing baby Jesus, his perspective is changed. For the first time, he notices a beggar, and gives him gold too. Omar, the king's advisor, is worried that King Melchoir's generosity will result in them both becoming penniless

and powerless. Omar drugs the king with a sleeping draught and takes his fine clothes and his crown for himself – Omar convinces the people of the kingdom that he is the King of Gold.

Melchoir wanders through towns and villages barefoot, sharing the story of baby Jesus. The women who hear the tale see the light of the wonderous star shining in his eyes. The men ask for the tale over and over, feeling that they too have shared the journey to Bethlehem. Melchoir, though penniless, feels as rich as a King of Gold, realising his story is more valuable than any treasure. Omar, meanwhile, has been killed in a sandstorm, and is never seen again. King Melchoir's son reigns on the throne, and Melchoir spends the rest of his days sharing his gift with the people, a gift worth more than gold - the story of the greatest king of all.

The King and the Gifts of Gold is written by a Christian Community priest, Georg Dreissig, and the heart of the story is clearly Christian, yet its broader message offers Christmas wisdom to all readers: true wealth comes not from what we own, but from how we share our gifts.

Briswalter's detailed illustrations give readers a glimpse of the traditional clothing, desert landscapes and bustling bazaars of the Holy Land.

Dawn Casey

The Little Island

Smriti Prasadam-Halls, illus. Robert Starling, pub. Andersen Press

This is a book that thinks Brexit is a bad idea. That's an issue we have to get past right at the start; your feelings on Brexit will colour your feelings towards the book. We get why Brexit happened – the geese resented the rest of the farm, and there were more of them than there was of the ducks on the island in the pond. We get what happens after the bridge to the rest of the farm gets taken away – it's all bad. When predatory foxes turn up and the other farm animals chase them away, the geese reconsider and the bridge is reinstated.

This isn't a subtle book. In all other ways it's very well written. Word choices are great, there's a good rhythm underpinning the sentences, phrases sit nicely in your mouth. The story skips along dynamically but, and I write this as someone who believes nothing was ever made any better by putting up a barrier, it makes me a bit uncomfortable. It's possible and preferable to make the same key points without so thinly cloaking recent and bitter events in animal skins. Would I suggest you avoid this book? No. In many ways it's a classy piece of work, but by predicting post-Brexit failure there is that propagandist aspect to it that will make it divisive and ironically self-limiting.

I've not mentioned the art. It delighted me. It's colourful, emotive, characterful, fluid. For this readership, it's some of the most engaging story-telling that I've seen in quite a while. Typically, I'll

look at a book for the first time and my read will be dragged back by an awkward or ambiguous visual; not so this time.

So, how do I feel overall? It's a lovely book to look at, and technically the story is well-told. Brexit is an issue that needs to be explained, but I feel it's simplistic to say that it's all the fault of the geese: in Britain the sentiment powering Brexit started being fed thirty years ago, there's no sense of process here. This'll be a good book to read with Years 2 and 3, if it's read smartly.

Dmytro Bojaniwskyj

Little Pearl

Martin Widmark, illus. Emilia Dziubak, pub. Floris Books

Little Pearl is the most beautiful picture book both in words and illustrations. It brought back memories of Alice in Wonderland - in the story, Grace (also known as Little Pearl) falls down an icy tunnel and into a world where she is as tiny as the insects, and the insects are most interested in her - no White Rabbit, but there is a beetle with a top hat.

It is a wonderfully, uplifting book as we follow Grace from a time of sadness (her brother has disappeared), to a time and place where she almost forgets her loss because this new magical world is so incredible; flying on the back of a dragonfly would shake off even the most hurtful of times in all probability! But Grace, or as the insects have named her - Little Pearl - discovers more than she ever thought possible in this hidden place: Her brother.

This is a story told within a story. Grace, now older, tells this tale to the little boy she is babysitting, which gives the reader a sense of security so as to be able to enjoy the adventure - and still feel the highs and lows - whilst knowing that Little Pearl will be okay. For those worried about this structure, I can honestly say don't be - it works and is done with such subtlety that it is the adventure and the journey in the tiny world of insects that is the heart and soul of the book. And there are still surprises - some good, and some a bit scary.

Martin Widmark is a well known Swedish Author who has also written *The House of Lost and Found*, partnering then too with illustrator Emilia Dziubak. They make an incredible team as each illustration vividly captures the magical weirdness of the journey Little Pearl is on. It has the feel of a classic from many years ago but - through both words and pictures - it shines with enough modernity for the tale to not feel old.

A beautiful book that you will want to look at again and again; ideal for 5 - 7 year-olds, being read to or, for older children in this bracket, reading alone.

Anja Stobbart

Madame Badobedah

Sophie Dahl, illus. Lauren O'Hara, pub. Walker Books

Madame Badobedah is such an interesting story, it instantly captures the imagination. A child would find themselves willingly drawn into this fast moving adventure, identifying with Mabel, who lives with her Mum, ('Good grief, all this..stuff,') and Dad, ('Whatever you say, Mabel,') in a bed and breakfast at the seaside, a seaside that is so beautifully illustrated, it feels as if touching the 'old-men trees' will actually prickle your fingers.

Mabel considers herself a proper spy, one who knows every room in The Mermaid Hotel, and especially Room 32 where the newest guest, Madame Badobedah who has taken up residence with piles of luggage, two dogs, two cats, a tortoise, crunchy red hair and smells of old roses. Exactly the sort of fascinating person a child would always hope to meet. Mabel, however, is convinced Madame is an ancient supervillain on the run from the Police.

Mabel and Madame Badobedah become friends and this older woman, tentative and a little fearful, joins with Mabel in her imaginative tales of pirates sailing the seven seas, later sharing with her stories from when she was a child, skating with her cousin, Olga. It becomes clear that Madame Badobedah is an immigrant who has lost her entire life in her flight for peace and safety. Such a sorrowful story for her, made happier with Mabel's kindness and empathy and the sharing of the secret hidden in Room 32.

An absolutely lovely book with wonderful illustrations. Look at the illustration of the ship sailing away from a war with thunder clouds overhead. All the horror of war is in this picture.

The lovely illustrations of The Mermaid Hotel; of Madame Badobedah; of Mabel herself dressed as a spy. The physical book has a smooth, colourful and enticing cover that any child will want to pick up and hold.

A book to read, reread and keep forever.

Gwen Grant

Mum's Jumper

Jayne Perkin, pub. Book Island

Losing someone close to you is painful no matter how much of a brave face you may try to put on it or what their relationship to you is, bereavement is a difficult time. This sympathetic, warm and loving picture book addresses the loss of a mother for one little girl. It does not dwell on the circumstances of the loss but with simple language and expressive illustration we learn that Mum was unwell, in hospital and sadly the illness took her away. Sad as this is and sad as her daughter and husband are we see all around them the memories of happiness and moments of light. From the very first page there are flowers - mum's favourite - all around. Then there are friends, there are family, there are teachers. We soon see how many people there are in our lives who love and care about us in very many different and important ways. We learn also that despite all the love surrounding us the loss of someone close is very difficult to deal with, it can create in us feelings we do not understand and that we find it hard to explain - here is where Jayne Perkin's illustrations come into their own.

See here the black cloud of grief and then there the bright red jumper that used to belong to mum. Find the little girl and her father swimming without being able to find the shore and also pouring over happy memories bringing smiles to their faces. The colour palette is strong and in keeping with the theme it is slightly muted too. The words are sparse, the language simple but the message could not be stronger. There is light, there will be moments of utter upset and grief but there will also be moments of joy. Memory is the most important aspect of grieving, keep the memories alive and the person will be with you always.

This is a most sensitive and yet uplifting picture book for readers of all ages but in particular children who may have experienced or been witness to others around them experiencing grief.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

My Hair

Hannah Lee, illus. Allen Fatimaharan, pub. Faber & Faber

Rich in diversity, humour and warmth, Hannah Lee's debut children's picture book, *My Hair*, explores individuality, inclusiveness and acceptance through a little girl's quest for the perfect hairstyle in readiness for her upcoming birthday.

With this pressing decision to make, the central character in this engaging story ponders the many and varied hairstyles worn by her friends and family members—'Michael has a mohawk', 'my brothers both have cornrows', 'Grandma's hair is short and cropped', 'Mummy has the most dazzling dreadlocks'—and based on these observations, contemplates what her own choice of hairstyle will be. We meet a spirited bunch of characters along the way, all with glorious hairstyles that say much about the people who choose to wear them.

Complementing the rhyming text, are the vibrant illustrations by Allen Fatimaharan. Using a warm palette of colours, Allen Fatimaharan's characters ooze charm, fun and energy, and give the book a bold confidence. The illustrations work to entertain as well as bolster the message and push the narrative along. Both Hannah Lee and Allen Fatimaharan are FAB (Faber Andlyn BAME) prize-winners, and the coming together of the two to collaborate on *My Hair* is indeed fortuitous.

Unfortunately, the rhyme and rhythm of the text is a little awkward and jarring at times, and noticeable when reading aloud, however this doesn't take away from the sentiment at the heart of this story.

Tastefully presented with glossy pages and a dedicated space for young readers to add a picture of their own hairstyle, this book would make a perfect gift for children aged 3 – 8. It would be a valuable addition to any library and a stimulus for classroom discussions about identity, choice and creativity.

Kathryn Adams

Read this Book if You Don't Want A Story

Richard Phillips, illus. Eric Zelz, pub. Tilbury House

I bonkers well love this book. I want to hold its hand and go out with it for pizza and dancing and a screwball comedy film starring Nia Vardalos or Lisa Kudrow, or maybe both. You'll understand I'm not typically this effusive.

What we have is an argument, an arch, funny, inventive and thoroughly meta argument, between a book and its pages. The book is resolutely refusing to have a story told within its covers; the pages work together to coax the book to relent. It does. The book overcomes its performance anxiety, gains confidence, breaks its writers block and ends in an uplifting moment – the sort it swore never to have – where it encourages its readers to launch their own epics off of its musings, ponderings and stated dislikes. To create the sorts of stories it promised never to.

There won't be many children who at some point in their reading careers find this book funny, properly funny, I'm sure of that. It's a fantastic change of pace, it's a light-hearted reassurance, it's a giggle. Smaller readers having it read to them will be tripped by a book that turns around and addresses them like a person; somewhat older readers used to narrators who know that they're there will likewise have their expectations kicked when it's the book and not the characters doing the talking. Me as an adult, I just loved the cheeky playfulness of it. I liked that the book visualised itself as a sulking Western hero; was subverted and poked fun at.

I think there's a risk you won't pick this up. The art isn't sumptuous and schooled referencing Alma Tadema and Rousseau; the words don't dance lyrically, but its apparent mainstreamness adds to its

naughtiness, the sense that perhaps this tension exists in every book; that at any moment any book might speak. That's why I'm here really: to make sure you won't pass it over. Each year I'll see two or three books that make me want to thrust them into the faces of all the parents, teachers and children I know. This year, this is one of those.

For all children from three to seven and the adults who read with them.

Dmytro Bojaniwskyj

The Sand Elephant

Rinna Hermann, illus. Sanne Dufft, pub. Floris Books

Paul has no one to play with and feels very lonely. He draws himself a companion in the sand, an elephant, and cuddles up underneath its trunk. Feeling sleepy he dozes off with his elephant, but is woken when the creature he has created shakes off the sand and stands before him. The elephant curls his great grainy trunk around Paul and lifts him up onto his back, together they kick up a sandstorm that brings a world of other sand animals to life.

My first thoughts on this book were that it does tread familiar ground, but the story is quite charming enough to earn this one a place on the bedtime bookshelves. I tried reading it aloud and Rinna Hermann's text is a satisfying read with plenty of description, but it never gets too flowery and alienating. This would be a lovely book for class storytimes and Sanne Dufft's illustrations will easily capture the eye. The pages almost feel sandy and speckly and they seem to have an inner warmth that brings the book to life. A sweet picture book about friendship, loyalty and imagination that I suspect many children would want read to them again and again.

Dawn Finch

The Secret of the Tattered Shoes

Jackie Morris, illus. Ehsan Abdollahi, pub. Tiny Owl

The Secret of the Tattered Shoes is part of publisher Tiny Owl's *One Story, Many Voices* series of books. Tiny Owl was set up in response to the lack of children's books that reflected the culture of founder Delaram Ghanimifard. Delaram wanted her sons to experience stories from home and appreciate the beautiful and diverse artistic heritage of Iran. Since 2015, Tiny Owl has published 17 books that celebrate the rich literary heritage of Persian culture, and its collaboration with contemporary artists from Iran showcases the unique illustrative styles coming from the region. Tiny Owl now also publishes books from around the world.

Jackie Morris, herself an acclaimed illustrator, here re-tells the Grimm's fairy-tale of *Twelve Dancing Princesses*, who, though their bedroom is locked each night, are found by the king each morning with worn out dancing shoes.

In Grimm's original, a soldier travelling through the forest is given a cloak of invisibility, which helps him discover that the princesses escape through a trapdoor, to dance with twelve princes. The king rewards the soldier by inviting him to choose one of the princesses to be his wife. In Morris' re-imagining of the ending, the soldier allows the princesses to explain their own story to the king, and to choose their own future. He himself returns to the mysterious forest-woman who gifted him the cloak, to see if she will dance with him. I enjoyed the way that Morris' re-telling balances rich sensuous detail with spare, clear language.

Ehsan Abdollahi's unique illustrative style is luxurious with texture and pattern. Shapes within shapes, feathers on birds, leaves on trees, gowns on princesses, are filled with hatched lines. Translucent hand-made papers create gossamer gowns for the princesses. Fantastic tulips are shaped from cut peacock feathers. Roses are petalled with tulle. Through-out, gold foiling highlights plump fruit, candle-flames and crowns.

The book is sumptuously produced with a red cloth spine. A beautiful gift-book.

Dawn Casey

The Star in the Forest

Helen Kellock, pub. Thames & Hudson

Maisie and Pip are staying with their grandparents in the country. Pip is happy to just take in the nature surrounding them but Maisie is impatient for adventures and desperately wants something to happen. When they see a flashing light as something falls from the sky Maisie is off like a shot to investigate, with Pip following and taking in their surroundings. What they discover is at first disappointing, but then they realize it's magic and Maisie begins to understand that being in a hurry is not always the best way to have adventures.

This is a delightful story of two very dissimilar sisters and how they react to their surroundings. It talks to us about appreciating the world we live in and discovering that important things do not always look very grand. The author is also the illustrator and she has brought a lot of atmosphere to the content. The story is set at night so there are a lot of dark tones, but great splashes of golden yellow highlight some of the creatures and also the mysterious object that fell from the sky. This would be a lovely story to help children think about the nature that we are surrounded by and also to understand that being thoughtful is a very positive thing.

Margaret Pemberton

The Star in the Forest by Helen Kellock is a tale of adventure and the bond between two sisters, one with a thirst for adventure and one content to sit by the fire and gaze at the night stars. The illustrations are beautiful and help to transport the reader right to the heart of the action.

The story begins when Maisie and Pip arrive to spend their holiday at their grandparent's cottage, near the woods. Masie longs for an adventure and, as soon as, she notices a bright flash in the sky, she is off to investigate. Pip trails after, and unlike Maisie, she takes her time to stop and notice the uncertainties and the beauty of the forest around them.

When the girls finally find what caused the sky to light up, Pip's knack for looking closely leads them to discover the true nature of the item and both girls are overjoyed. Masie learns to slow down and take in the full delights of the forest. Both girls differing outlooks on life complement each other well, just like with the best of sisters.

The use of light in the illustrations is particularly effective. At each page turn, the eye is drawn to the lit-up parts of the page and the riches of the forest that are highlighted there, if one looks carefully, of course!

A recommended read for all girls and boys with a thirst for adventure and desire to find the very best treasures.

Evelyn Bookless

Starbird

Sharon King-Chai, pub. Two Hoots

Everything about this book is exquisite. Impeccably well-crafted and illustrated by the author, Sharon King-Chai, *Starbird* is an absolute delight to hold and each turn of the page draws the reader further into its mythical world.

“There was only one Starbird – the beautiful and enchanted creature whose song wove the most magical dreams.”

King-Chai's original fable tells of the Moon King who searched for and captured Starbird for his newborn daughter, the princess. A beautiful gesture; but a songbird in captivity doesn't bode well and eventually makes for a sad little princess and no song. What ensues is a search for freedom that takes Starbird on an adventure to many exotic lands alive with an assortment of animals ready to help him

along the way. Readers will be swept along on the adventure by the ever-present emotional undercurrent.

An Australian born designer, illustrator and art director, Sharon King-Chai (now based in London) has an impressive and varied body of work under her belt. Her expertise in all these areas of creativity is immediately evident in *Starbird*, and her artwork—whether it be the striking cover design or the luxurious double-paged landscape scenes—is something to relish. The intricate silver foil work that shimmers throughout the pages is elegant and impressive and contrasts beautifully with the stylised illustrations of the characters and creatures. A clever use of negative space creates intrigue: there is much to discover in this gem of a book.

This stunning hardcover picture book about freedom, compassion and the power of love is for young and old to enjoy; for collectors to collect and givers to gift. This is definitely one to display and one to savour from cover to cover. Enjoy!

Kathryn Adams

Sulwe

Lupita Nyong'o, illus. Vashiti Harrison, pub. Puffin Books

This stunningly illustrated debut picture book is written by the Academy Award-winning actress Lupita Nyong'o. She has based it on some of her own experiences as a child to come to terms with her appearance and believing in her own beauty.

The story follows a young girl, Sulwe, who sees her skin as darker than that of everyone else in her family and at school and believes this means she is not beautiful and bright like her mother and sister. It tells of the bullying she suffers at school; the extreme measures she takes to try and lighten her skin and the anxiety it made her feel. Her mother tries to explain that she is beautiful and that beauty comes from within, but it takes a magical adventure with a shooting star who shows her the story of sisters Day and Night to persuade her.

The illustrations in this book are magical and whimsical. They accompany the story beautifully and enhance it all the way through. The details and colours are gorgeous and set the scene throughout.

The message of this book is to always believe that you are beautiful inside and out, even if others cannot see it; don't wait for others to tell you what is beautiful. It saddens me that this is a story that needs to be told in this day and age and like the author, I hope that more children begin their lives knowing their worth and not needing to be told this message.

Victoria Wharam

Tibble and Grandpa

Wendy Meddour, illus. Daniel Egneus, pub. Oxford Children's Books

The first thing I noticed with this book were the illustrations; it was like turning the pages of a patchwork quilt. Subtle colours and bold pictures are in keeping with the mood of the story.

This is a story about grief and how a little boy, Tibble, helps his Grandad to deal with the loss of his wife; his Grandma. Grandad has stopped talking and spends all his time gardening and Tibble doesn't understand why, but he is determined to get his Grandad talking again. Through a series of what are you top 3 (sandwiches, jellyfish, days out, Grannies, stars) games, Tibble helps his Grandad to cope with the loss and recognise he is not on his own. They make their favourite sandwiches, they draw their favourite jellyfish, they go on their favourite days out and slowly Grandad does less gardening, plays more with Tibble and slowly starts to feel happier and experience life again with his grandson.

The loss of a family member is always a difficult time for everyone in the family; adults and children alike. This story is sympathetic to this and shows children how it can affect the people left behind and the part they can play in the process. It demonstrates how important it is for us to communicate with our family and talk about death and remember the happy memories of those that have gone. The discussion about favourite Grannies is particularly moving and demonstrates this sentiment beautifully.

Victoria Wharam

Together

Clover Robin, illus. Isabel Otter, pub. Little Tiger Press

A vast migration.

Cranes take turns to lead their flock:

The feathered arrow.

In this highly original, gorgeously illustrated, nonfiction picture book, readers follow a flock of cranes as they cross the globe spying on a variety of land and sea creatures. What do they see? Unlikely pairs of animals working together and supporting each other in various ways. Each stunning spread includes a simple haiku poem matched with short but fascinating facts about each animal duo. As readers move through the pages, we start to gain a whole new appreciation for the mysteries of the wild.

It starts simply. From the die-cut front cover, we see three birds in flight. These birds are, in fact, our compass, leading us through forests, mountains, oceans and deserts on the pages within. Below them, we spot various animals – a herd of chamois, remora fish gliding under a shark, a bird sitting near a tree full of honeycomb.

Once we've skimmed the colourful collage-like illustrations full of deep colours and rich textures, we are drawn to read the haiku poem that gives us a hint of what is happening on the page. A closer look reveals one in the herd is a lookout. The fish are actually cleaning parasites off of the shark. The bird has led a badger to honey. With interest piqued, we read the factual sentence or two on the opposing page explaining how and why these animals are working together. Which leads us back to reviewing the illustration again and seeing (now) how their cooperation is beneficial to each of them.

This is such an interesting book to read. The format allows for so much discussion and a leisurely pace to look and look again. Read and re-read what is written about each scene. While the haiku poems are a bit mysterious, it lends a lovely tone to the book and begs readers to find out what is going on.

Although aimed at children aged 5 - 7, I can see this book appealing to and being relevant in classrooms of children both younger and older. Younger children will be fascinated by the animal facts while older children can experience a different form of poetry and investigate the interactions of animals in the context of the balance of nature.

Together is a unique picture book full of wonder, nature and poetry. A real joy to read and experience.

Stephanie Ward

The Ultimate Survival Guide to Monsters Under the Bed

Mitch Frost, illus. Daron Parton, pub. Buster Books

This funny and super colourful illustrated book will have children laughing and taking the ten steps to achieving a monster free night which it both describes and creates a story from. The book includes a variety of different monsters, all from the imagination of course, that keep many children awake during the night. That it does so in a witty childlike manner is a great help for both the adult and child who will no doubt be sharing the book.

Alongside this, and to my great delight (and most likely that of other adult readers) both author and illustrator make a point of telling their young reading audience that of course the best way to keep the nighttime monsters at bay is to keep the bedroom clean and tidy! Additionally, and perhaps more importantly they also encourage the brushing teeth as monsters just hate the minty smell of toothpaste and a freshly brushed set of teeth! This is quite brilliant, we all know that many children cannot be bothered with this task.

Furthermore, incorporating the concept of being clean with using soap and suggesting more soap is used by children in the home to help with the monster issue is both a very wise and practical approach for author and illustrator to take. As many adults will know children love to play with water but are not so keen on soap!

A brilliant book which is vibrant, fun and passes on many important messages to children. I know for certain that the younger of my grandchildren will be enjoying this with me!

Susan Thomas

The Ups and Downs of the Castle Mice

Michael Bond, illus. Emily Sutton, pub. Bodley Head

The castle mice, Mr and Mrs Perk and their thirteen children, live in a doll's house in a rich earl's castle, and summer visitors love to try and spot them. As the season draws to a close, the number of visitors declines, and the Earl and Countess go on holiday for three months, leaving the new Chief Clerk, Lucy Price, in charge. The mice are suspicious of her, as Mrs Perk had heard telephone conversations about "those pesky mice" as she passed through the office with supplies for her larder. Sure enough, Miss Price removes the dust sheets, and puts up posters advertising a photographic competition, for which people pay to enter, and there are to be prizes for photos including mice, the more mice the better. The mice are very unhappy at the constant stream of lenses poking at them, and they know that Miss Price has every intention of keeping the piles of money she is collecting.

When word reaches the mice that the Earl and Countess are coming home, they hatch a plan. Mr Perk tells the children they are going out to dinner, and they all feast on the paper money, and sleep very well indeed. In the morning, the Earl and Countess are surprised to see Miss Price scurrying away down the drive. An odd rubber band is that remains of the money, and only the mice know what happened, but the reader might wonder whether any amateur photographers enquired about the competition...

It's a good story, if rather old-fashioned, and Emily Sutton's retro-style illustrations are perfectly suited. Like Paddington Bear, the mice wear clothes, but such clothes: hats with feathers, frock coats, waistcoats, lace collars and bows, and the other details in the castle, including paintings on the walls, give the reader a lot to look at and admire. You have to look closely to see Mrs Perk scampering across the office carpet, and spotting the mice hiding in the many rooms of the doll's house is a challenge.

Beautiful William Morris-like endpapers in this hardback also make this a book of quality, and one to treasure for fans of Michael Bond.

Diana Barnes

What I Like Most

Mary Murphy, illus. Zhu Cheng-Liang, pub. Walker Books

This is a complex and adorable picture book that deals with change and consistency in many forms and shows how these conditions are fine and normal states of being. The little girl at the centre of the story is around four years old and she celebrates various things that she “likes most in the world.” In this circular story she focuses on one thing (for example shoes); explains why she likes it so much (they have lights that flash and she can bounce in them); describes how her view might change (her feet will grow too big for them); and reinforces how she likes them most in the world. However, on the turn of the page she says “except for ...” and follows the same pattern with a new object. There is her view from her window, her Grandmother’s apricot jam, the river, a red colouring pencil, chips, a book (which is depicted as being Cheng-Liang’s own 2011 award-winning *A New Year’s Celebration*), and a teddy bear. She concludes her list of favourite things in a way reminiscent of Sam McBratney’s *Guess How Much I Love You* by stating that her mother is what she “likes the very, very most in the world.”

I found her reasoning about why she likes these objects more than any other and why that might change to be quite adult in complexity which jars with the young girl’s first person narration. The objects and reasons cover various themes. There is the natural world – the seasonal and environmental impact on the river; societal – people moving both into and away from the street; and the depletion of consumables such as eating all of the jam and chips, using the red pencil so much that there is none left or wearing the shoes out. This philosophical and practical approach juxtaposes with the sentimental finale and is just one of many contrasts for example the endpapers depict the tree in Springtime blossom and Autumnal leaves.

The girl acknowledges with a straightforward, no fuss, realistic attitude why she may alter her sentimental treasuring of objects in time such as her feet will grow or even her feelings will change as she gets older: “maybe when I am bigger I won’t want to read it every day. But for now it is what I like most in the world.” As such, this book not only celebrates consistency and change but also savouring and saving objects: it is the antithesis to complacency. It also shows that you can be simultaneously sentimental and practical. I also like how it highlights that you can love somebody as much as the girl loves her mother “even when we are cross with each other” and “even though you change and I change.” Differences and disagreements amongst loved ones do not irredeemably change the true nature of the relationship.

This multi-layered book could also be described as celebrating family and personal relationships over consumerism and the need for things and it also promotes being joyful and grateful for the little

things in life. Along the lines of Pollyanna's *Glad Game* or the Von Trapp's *Favourite Things*, it encourages the reader to decide on their own personal favourites.

The bold and vibrant watercolour illustrations depict a sensitive and observant little girl who seems full of fun and mischief. There is a lot in Cheng-Liang's charming and engaging work that reminds me of Rebecca Cobb and his style really amplifies the gentle, poignant, tender, and cheerful story. This is a book about what you like the most, about how the world and you yourself can change, about what matters most and savouring the little joys in life.

Natalie McChrystal Plimmer

What's That Noise?

Naomi Howarth, pub. Otter-Barry Books

This wonderful pleasing story is most enjoyable, with creative illustrations which made me smile at each turning of the page, to find out about the noise. The story is a delight and extremely well thought out, I loved the characters and such bold illustrations which will hold any child's interest, encouraging them to carry on reading and find out where the story and the picture lead ... who would have thought the noise was Magnus!

It was intriguing to meet all of his friends along the way. Not only was the story captivating but a great added bonus was to find information at the end of the book about the arctic along with the detailed drawings of the friends of Magnus the Seal - Arctic Fox, Arctic Hare, Snowy Owl, Polar Bear and Walrus. You could not ask for more in this picture book, and the added detail made it all the more readable. I imagine that some children may even attempt to draw or trace the animals that live in the Arctic, and want to learn more about this very different habitat at the north pole. A fascinating book that reaches out to readers on many levels.

Susan Thomas

Yum Yummy Yuck

Cree Lane, illus. Amanda Jane Jones, pub. Prestel Children's Books

An important rite of passage for any small child is an extended period of putting things in your mouth. This can range from the endearing (soft toys, wooden spoons) to the bizarre (table legs, remote controls) to the revolting (cat food, dirty washing, bodily fluids). A highlight in our family was when my daughter ate a used plaster. She seemed to survive, so I'm hoping it has built up her immune system!

Yum Yummy Yuck attempts to tackle this issue through a multiple choice approach. Readers are confronted with a series of images that randomly flit between ‘Yum’ (bananas) to ‘Yummy’ (ice-cream) and ‘Yuck’ (snot, plasters). The reader is encouraged to provide the correct response to each item in the (possibly over-optimistic) hope that a similar strategy will be deployed in real life.

This book has a definite appeal for very young children who are just learning to explore and respond to the world around them. The images are bold and simple, the board pages robust enough to withstand a degree of manhandling (and, doubtless, gumming). The concept of ‘categorising’ objects is simple and fun, and could lead to entertaining games applied to other household objects. This is a book about a universal theme, created with humour and affection.

Laura Myatt

Junior Book Reviews

Boy Giant: Son of Gulliver

Michael Morpurgo, illus. Michael Foreman, pub. Harper Collins

Following Jonathan Swift's novel, *Gulliver's Travels*, a politico-social satire on his own early eighteenth-century times, Michael Morpurgo has joined the many writers who have used that novel as a springboard for their own critique of contemporary life. At the centre of Morpurgo's re-imagining are refugees from the war in Afghanistan, with Omar – who estimates he is sixteen years old – the central character. Escaping from a refugee camp because they fear the war is moving ever closer, Omar's mother has only enough money to pay for Omar to travel on a people-smuggler's boat, in the hope that he can reach his Uncle Said, who runs a café in Cornwall. When the boat runs out of fuel, food and water Omar is shipwrecked, and is washed up on the island of Lilliput, where the descendants of the tiny people of *Gulliver's Travels* call him 'Son of Gulliver'.

Morpurgo shows the modern Lilliputians to be a race whose attitudes have evolved from those of Gulliver's times, and they are now an entirely socially responsible, benevolent and pacifist people. Morpurgo shows readers the difference between the horrors which have resulted in our time from the inhumanity of people, greed, hatred, fear of anyone different, and the people the Lilliputians have become. For example for every old or lonely person there is someone to befriend them, and bullying is unknown. Unlike Swift Morpurgo divides his book into five, not four parts, with the third a retelling of the original story, told to Omar by the Lilliputians in order to show why they have changed their ways from Gulliver's time.

Like the original Gulliver Omar is instrumental in resolving a threat of war, where tyranny in a neighbouring island, whose dictator wishes to enslave the Lilliputians, will remind readers of the many similar situations around the world at present. The symbolic destruction of a wall reminds us of the use of particular twentieth and twenty-first century walls to restrict people's movement. The final part depicts Omar's arrival in England, showing both the hostile and helpful attitudes Omar finds. A deeply thought-provoking, wonderfully illustrated, absolutely compelling novel.

Bridget Carrington

Butterflies for Grandpa Joe

Nicola Davies, illus. Mike Byrne, pub. Barrington Stoke

Grandpa Joe has changed. He used to spend all his time in the garden or in the fields exploring and catching butterflies, but he now sits inside watching television. Everything is dark and silent in the house since Granny Lou died. Ben, his grandson, does not know what to do.

Butterflies for Grandpa Joe is a heart-breaking story of a family growing apart. Ben's dad Stewart died when Ben was young and he had lived happily with his Grandpa and Grandma for many years. Then his mum met Keith, married and had twin girls. Grandpa and Grandma stopped visiting and no-one spoke about it. It seems that only Ben and the home-help Mrs John cares about Grandpa Joe. Mum is too busy anyway, working as a teacher and looking after twins. It looks like Grandpa Joe will be put into an old people's home. That is, until Ben hatches a plan.

The author Nicola Davies beautifully describes the deep affection between Ben and Grandpa Joe as Ben's memories mix with the present, allowing the reader to empathise with Ben's situation. The author also communicates effectively the confusion children feel when situations aren't explained to them. For example, Ben's mum and Keith exchange a knowing look twice that Ben sees, but does not understand. The message seems to be that he is too young or the reasons too painful. A malaise seems to gather and a palpable sense of hopelessness. The story however will end happily.

Butterflies for Grandpa Joe is a great story as well as help children understand families do fall out and find it difficult to reconcile.

Simon Barrett

Eight Princesses and a Magic Mirror

Natasha Farrant, illus. Lydia Corry, pub. Zephyr

Are you one of the generation of rebel girls for whom many books are now being written? Perhaps you are a princess in the making or maybe you are just someone who loves a story with a touch of magic, a sprinkling of adventure and a modicum of determination? Natasha Farrant has combined all these elements here for us, for you, in her stores of eight different princesses. Set in different times, in different places there are modern alongside old tales and accompanying them are illustrations from a new talent who has selected the highlights from Natasha's stories and turned them into pictures which pick out some of the strongest untold aspects of each story bringing them to life in even more detail.

The stories in this collection made me smile, and laugh too for here there are princesses who know their own minds, who want to argue, have their own way and go straight to the rescue themselves - after all is there much point in waiting for that knight in shining armour these days? Are you wondering where all these princesses have come from - after all our traditional tales are not full of them - well it was an enchanted mirror, of course. When an enchantress wants to know something she

has her ways of finding out and for one in particular her way was to transform a mirror into one that would be all seeing, all knowing and would help guide us through these tales which span both continents and centuries.

Natasha Farrant has a magical and natural storytelling style which is evident throughout the book and will entice any who are reading these tales - yes they are traditional in many ways but they are also modern, fun and thought provoking and I, for one, had a great time when I was reading them. I just hope that you will too.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone

Jaclyn Moriarty, pub. Guppy Books

Ten year old Bronte Mettlestone is far from concerned when she receives a telegram that her parents have been killed by pirates, after all, her parents did run away to have adventures of their own when she was just a baby. But when Bronte discovers that her parents have left her a bizarrely detailed list of instructions – instructions that if left uncompleted will mean terrible things will happen – in their will, Bronte’s previously pleasant and quiet life of afternoon teas and riding lessons becomes a wild and whimsical journey across kingdoms far and wide delivering guests to a string of aunts she barely knows. But as she travels from aunt to aunt, Bronte suspects there might be more to this journey than the simple deed of delivering treasure; though little does she suspect that she will have to play such a big part in the extraordinary events that follow...

Between a sprinkling of subtle clues and connections, Jaclyn Moriarty skilfully unravels a delightfully wholesome and unique tale of friendship, family and finding yourself set in world of dragons, water sprites, elves and an evil Whispering King. Rich in charm, magic and wonder, Moriarty’s words beautifully dance between the pages in a slow, satisfactory way, resulting in a tale that utterly captivated my heart.

As entertaining as it is enchanting, featuring a whole host of unforgettable characters, including the fearless Bronte and some truly spirited and special aunts, *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone*, is a storytelling masterpiece. It is one that I thoroughly recommend for anyone wanting to escape on an extraordinarily quirky adventure for an hour or two. Perfect for fans Joan Aiken and Kiran Millwood Hargrave.

Fern Tolley

Flember: The Secret Book

Jamie Smart, pub. David Fickling Books

Perched at the top of an island called Fember, the little village of Eden is home to Dev, his mother and brother. Dev is an enthusiastic inventor, his designs ranging from Chicken Boots, Cheese Wings and Portable Airbags, to Banana Lights and a Goat-Powered Washtopus. It is while using the Washtopus to clean up a mishap caused by the Cheese Boots, that Dev finds himself in great trouble. Summoned by Mayor Bumblebuss, Dev is forbidden from attending the celebrations of Fember Day and ordered to clean the mess created by the Cheese Boots.

While removing the messy aftermath of the cheese explosion from an antique shop, Dev comes across a giant golden heart and enters in possession of an intriguing book, Fember Island. Books are banned in Eden to prevent 'encouraging troublesome thoughts'. Dev is certainly inspired by the pages on the transference of fember, the energy that flows through the island and that is shared among all living things.

Using the information on the book initially with the intention to repair a toy bear, Dev ends up creating a huge, living bear called Boja who soon proceed to bring chaos to the celebrations of Fember Day taking place in Eden every year.

Humorous disasters follow, while Dev realises that a choice may be necessary between protecting Boja and the very life of Eden.

A lively and funny book, full of inventions which are illustrated in details for the joy of the most creative readers, this book by Jamie Smart will become a firm favourite for those children enjoying the style of this author. A fast sequence of events, an eclectic cast of characters including a blacksmith reminiscent of the god Vulcan, a group of friends called Space Fleet and a pompous mayor complement a story that has at its core a message about the importance of caring and sharing.

While I would recommend it to the younger audience, I also have to say that a very little, rather graphic, sentence spoken by grumpy antique dealer Zerigauld jarred with me and felt just a bit over the top compared to the language of the rest of the book. It is obviously a very personal comment. It will probably raise many giggles among the young readers who are going to love this mad adventure and will wait eagerly for its sequel.

Laura Brill

FloodWorld

Tom Huddleston, pub. Nosy Crow

Set in a flooded future world, Kara and Joe spend their days in a floating slum between the edge of a ruined London, now protected by a wall built to home the privileged, and the vast ocean where ruthless Mariners, who are deemed as murderous terrorists, spend their lives entirely at sea. But when fearless Kara and determined yet naïve Joe find themselves in possession of a mysterious map, they suddenly find themselves treading water in a dangerous world of gangsters, pirates, corruption and power struggles. What unravels is a vivid dystopian thriller about the repercussions of power and greed, the morals of political activism and protecting the community and the planet.

From perilous waterways of a sunken city, to the ruins of a floating London, from high-tech submarines to deserted underground stations, Huddleston has skilfully created a thrilling yet scarily unsettling world, in which I found myself utterly immersed in. Huddleston's startlingly cinematic take on the devastating consequences of a world ravaged by a changing climate, rising sea levels and a society in turmoil felt as fictitious as it did foreseeable. With our own planet's current cry against climate change, the environmental edge to *FloodWorld* made this a thought-provoking and timely tale. Yet in amongst these important issues is a fast-paced, action-packed adventure. Whirlpools of twists and turns await in every chapter, an array of fierce and diverse characters feather the horizon and a sibling relationship built on love and loyalty is what kept me rooted to my seat, eagerly turning the page.

Suitable for readers 10/11+, I already can't wait to read the sequel, *DustRoad* (out March 2020), where Kara and Joe's gripping adventures continue, this time in the US, as they continue to fight to save the future.

FloodWorld is perfect for fans of *The Dog Runner* by Bren MacDibble and for older readers, *The Secret Deep* by Lindsay Galvin.

Fern Tolley

The Fowl Twins

Eoin Colfer, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books

This is a follow-up from the best-selling *Artemis Fowl* series, featuring the 12 year old Artemis. The Fowl twins are 11 year old Myles and Beckett. They are very different twins. Beckett is blond and messy and doesn't like wearing clothes. He likes to juggle goldfish. Myles is very neat, has an IQ of 170 and he has jet black hair. He wears a suit every day, which he 3D prints. Very exciting things happen to the Artemis twins; they are shot at, kidnapped, buried, arrested, threatened and killed, although not permanently. Importantly, they discover that the strongest bond is the one that exists between twins.

This is an epic adventure with many dangers and some very impressive high tech gadgets. There are some exciting characters, including a troll, an evil immortal duke and a knife wielding nun called Jeronima. She is not your average nun and is out to prove the existence of magical creatures. There is also Lazuli Heitz, a hero and a pixie come elf. Lord Teddy Bleedham Drye is a royal thorn in the twins side.

Just after their 11th birthday the twins are left in the care of their house security system for one night and what follows is a very intricate and fast moving plot full of mystery, mayhem, suspense and death. There is some very fast dialogue. The chapters are long and there is some difficult language, which some readers will find hard to get into.

This series should be enjoyed by both existing *Artemis* fans and new ones. It can be read without having read the previous *Artemis Fowl* books. So, if you are looking for a very entertaining novel, with lots of action, gadgets and humans, fairies and trolls, then this is the book for you. Not forgetting the dastardly villains and some humour.

Gary Kenworthy

Frostheart

Jamie Littler, pub. Puffin Books

Ever since Ash's parents left him at the Fira Stronghold out in the desolate, coldest part of the Snow Sea, he has been waiting and longing for their return. But it has been several long years, during which time he has been regarded with increasing suspicion and hostility by the Fira people. Ash is a Song Weaver but must keep his talent hidden, because singing, and music of any kind, is forbidden, as it attracts Leviathans, awful monsters which lurk in the snowy wastes, preying on anyone foolish enough to venture out of the Stronghold.

The urge to sing is something Ash must learn to ignore but on one occasion he can't help himself. At this time he is handed into the care of a new guardian, grumpy yeti Tobu. When a Pathfinder sleigh arrives, Ash eagerly accepts the invitation to join the crew of the Frostheart, hoping this will enable him to find his parents. A whole world of adventure awaits, as well as the opportunity to practice his singing. With Tobu guiding his studies, Ash must learn patience as well as perseverance, before he can master his amazing powers and fulfill his destiny.

Peopled with a fantastical array of characters, set in world consisting of snow and ice, where survival is anything but certain, this is a rip-roaring adventure, shot through with humour and the power of friendship.

There is a definite undercurrent of *Star Wars*, with Ash learning to use the power of the World Weave [or Force] as he masters singing and struggles with temptation to the Dark Side, but this just adds to the enjoyment!

Illustrated throughout by the author, this is recommended for readers of 9+, who I'm sure will look forward to the continuing adventure as much as I am.

Jayne Gould

The Girl Who Lost her Shadow

Emily Ilett, pub. Floris Books

On Gail's birthday the most peculiar thing happens, her shadow disappears – literally slips under the door and is gone! Given that her dad has already displayed similar behaviour by leaving her and her sisters behind Gail things nothing of it, accepting it almost. But when the shadow of her older sister goes missing too Gail feels compelled to investigate and meets creatures, makes new friends and discovers the truth about herself along the way.

In a story that touches on highly relevant topics like mental health and the protection of marine animals - a subject that is dear to both Gail and her sisters' hearts - there are dark parts to this story, yes – and not just when there is mention of the shadows. However Emily Ilett balances this with much light and good throughout the story too.

The balance between dark and light is expressed brilliantly as we follow Gail into the dark on her pursuit of the shadows which contrasts perfectly with blossoming friendships and strengthening relationships between the sisters.

Confident readers will enjoy reading this book as it has a lot to offer and they will take a lot from it. This is a tale of true bravery and one which I thoroughly enjoyed and would highly recommend.

Samantha Thomas

The Girl Who Speaks Bear

Sophie Anderson, illus. Kathrin Honesta, pub. Usborne

This has been one of the most anticipated books of the year, building up from watching the proofs being hand stamped to seeing them land on twitter in the hands of lucky readers.

I can attest that it is worth waiting for, will become an instant classic and most certainly a new favourite for many. I also predict accolades and awards.

We meet Yanka, a girl found in the woods as a baby. She is found and loved by her foster mother, Mamochka and the village she lives in, but feels like part of her belongs in the forest. “But if I don’t know where I came from, how can I be sure where I belong?” She has a best friend Sasha and a house weasel named Mousetrap. Mousetrap is one of the fiercest and most loyal friends Yanka has on her adventure to self-discovery. When Yanka feels drawn to the forest, she has to leave her home, and it is Sasha who she will miss and who wants her to stay. It is Mousetrap who helps her along her journey.

What a journey it is! Yanka’s spirit, determination and courage are tested every step of the way. She meets fascinating and dangerous creatures and friendly, loyal characters who impart nuggets of wisdom and stories that provide clues to Yanka's heritage.

This story is full of rich language, lyrical and full of imagery from folk and fairy tales. Yanka is courageous, curious and loyal. She yearns to know more about her past and we learn details from the interwoven folktales that all link together seamlessly. These are told as part of an oral storytelling culture, passing them from generation to generation.

Kathrin Honesta’s rich and expertly drawn illustrations take the reader one step closer to the story. There is a map at the beginning and who doesn’t love a map!!

Sit back and relax while Sophie Anderson begins, “Once Upon a Time...”

This is simply stunning! Full of magic, courage and finding family along your journey! If you liked *The House with Chicken Legs*, then I can guarantee you will like this too.

Erin Hamilton

The Goldsmith and the Master Thief

Tonke Dragt, pub. Pushkin Children’s Books

The Goldsmith and the Master Thief are brothers who have come to these occupations through following their aspirations in life. At the same time however, because they are related and look similar the pair are easily mistaken for one another. This mistaken identity happens on many occasions leading to adventures that need the pair of them to work together in order to find the resolution they require.

The brothers are names Lorenzo and Jiaco and their lives are struck by tragedy but tragedy which leads them to escapades of such incredible daring and adventure that they will be tested to their limits

and have their readers on the edges of their seats! Danger, riddles, adventure on land and at sea - it is all here. Can the brothers survive their adventures, will you dare to join them?

This is the first English translation of a classic adventure that feels familiar through similar films and stories (Barbie even did one called Princess and the Popstar) and it has that highly quality feel to it that all good classics should. This story will be a huge hit with fans of adventure stories and traditional tales.

Samantha Thomas

Guardians of Magic: Cloud Horse Chronicles #1

Chris Riddell, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

Have you ever seen a cloud horse? No? You are not alone, none of the children looking up at the billowing clouds day in, day out have seen one either, they look up, they make a wish and they hope very much for it to come true.

The scene is now set and the story will unfold. We are in the Kingdom of Trynne, a place where there is magic and there are fairy tales but neither of which will behave - in fact the magic insists on cropping up in the most unexpected of places! Because of this there is danger for Zam, Phoebe and Bathsheba - our courageous heroes and heroines. Magic is forbidden you see but it is still there and it is under threat from the King Rat who is getting decidedly too big for his boots, the Clockmaker who is in charge of the time and the Professional Princess all of whom want the sacred magic for themselves and their own evil purposes.

Whilst the story may sound as though it has familiar premises it is as fresh and new as all Chris Riddell's tales. Combine this with his sparkling wit, his brilliance in illustration and his desire to make children laugh, read, repeat this is the first book in a new series that is most definitely not to be missed. Children of all ages will find plenty to enjoy whether it is in the description of the fantastical land and cityscapes, the reinvented classic fairy tales or Chris' own twists and turns.

A highly recommended read which may just make all your wishes come true!

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Harriet versus the Galaxy

Samantha Baines, illus. Jessica Flores, pub. Knights Of

Harriet Green is ten years old. She uses a hearing aid. To her surprise Harriet learns that her hearing aid has an unexpected capability. It can translate alien languages into English. At the same time Harriet discovers that her grandmother also has a secret. She is part of a clandestine organisation called Secret Astronaut Spies. The aim of this group is to combat a species of alien invader known as the Munchas, who devour lipsticks, pens, socks and knickers.

Unknown to her grandmother, Harriet has been fraternising with the enemy. She has a friend named Sock Muncha, thus illustrating that not all the Munchas are a threat to humanity – or to humanity's underwear.

Baines's book is written from a specific point of view. The author herself is a hearing aid user and thus understands the feelings of those who may struggle to hear all they would wish to hear. There is also a child who is non-binary, that is to say someone who identifies neither as wholly male nor as wholly female. Robin is the first such character that this reviewer has encountered in middle grade books. The book also maintains a high level of comic absurdity. One of the alien planets is named Do You Want Fries With That? The illustrations of Jessica Flores are truly quirky. They look as if they could easily be part of a comic strip or a graphic novel. Why not?

Rebecca Butler

The International Yeti Collective

Paul Mason, illus. Katy Riddell, pub. Little Tiger

Twelve-year old Ella is in the Himalayas helping her celebrity explorer uncle film his new television series following his search for yeti. As any signs of the mysterious creatures continue to elude the team, Ella begins to question whether they are actually mythological as many suspect. That is until Tick, a curious young yeti, crosses paths with her and sets into motion events that could put the whole Yeti species and indeed the whole world into danger.

As human and yeti paths intertwine there are escapades and adventures galore, family secrets are uncovered, confidence and bravery develop, and an age-old secret civilisation that has communities all around the world unites once again. For the Yeti world lives by its ancient sacred rules and one that is very important is the deep distrust they have towards their distant cousins, humans. This law turns out to be both true and false but it is because of inquisitive and impulsive Tick that the yeti discover the devastating affect the human species have had on the world but also that they are not all the same and some can do good.

Mason has created a fascinating and very detailed very realistic yeti world where the differences and similarities between the various tribes across the world such as Tick's Himalayan Mountain Yeti or the New Zealand Makimaki or the British Greybeards are skilfully drawn. He has constructed societal

traditions and customs with such aplomb that they seem so convincing for such an archaic society; you could easily believe that it is not solely his imagination that has conjured them up but that he has been personally privy to such worlds. There is also great wit and humour involved that makes the yeti very endearing characters. Their food includes delicacies such as cicadas with snail gravy or rabbit dropping dumplings. They greet each other with wise sayings; some profound like one shall not reach the top of a mountain by sitting on the bottom or if you kick a stone in anger, you hurt only your own foot and others just strange such as the first pancake is always a mess or with patience, even the ant can eat an elephant. They also have charming humorous names such as Leeke (She who smells pleasingly like onions), Song (He with tuneful voice), Nosh (She who makes nibbles) or Aspp (She with venomous tongue).

Ella is an engaging character, she is a strong resourceful girl who is kind and thoughtful and is brave enough to stand up to the adults around her in a forceful but considered way so that they listen instead of dismiss her. Mason also interestingly uses montage scenes to speed the story along and introduce the different clans but it is also through these scenes that we learn what each group's role is in protecting nature and the earth. The map at the end of the book (together with a glossary of yeti terms) highlights how each group have their specific roles such as seed dispersal squad, fungus maintenance, forest custodians, or guardians of the apes. One of the central themes is that everything is connected and humans are destroying the earth as the yeti endeavour to keep the ecological balance of the world intact. One key scene is when Tick observes humans purposely setting a forest alight so they can plant new trees to make palm oil. The book ends with a quote from Gerald Durrell reinforcing the message of the world being a delicate and complicated spider's web which humans are tearing holes in.

Another key theme is the idea of cryptozoology and what it means to still have areas of the world that people do not know much about. It asks the reader to think about whether wild spaces untouched still by humans and the mysteries they hold such as creatures like the yeti should be celebrated and preserved or whether people, such as Ella's uncle, are right in wanting to find out the truth and share it with everybody. It alludes to examples from the past where people's search for answers have had devastating impact on the environment.

This first book in *The Yeti Collective* series is a heart-warming exciting funny action-packed read and an unusual captivating addition to the eco-lit genre. I look forward to more yeti filled adventures.

Natalie McChrystal Plimmer

Kitty and the Moonlight Rescue

Paul Harrison, illus. Jennie Lovlie, Oxford Children's Books

Meet Kitty - feline superhero in training, by moonlight she has the most amazing adventures and here, in her first outing, we are going to share them with her.

Kitty, as you may have guessed from the title is a young kitten and whilst she would love, more than anything, to be as fearless and brave as her mum, disappearing into the dark of the night to help others she just doesn't think she is quite there yet. When she has a chance encounter with another cat, the black and white Fiago, a cat in search of her own mother Kitty realises that bravery comes in many forms and that in fact she has her very own and very special set of superpowers. After all when mum is out on call it is completely up to Kitty to set aside her fears and prevent disaster.

With mysteries to solve, untold dangers to overcome and fears to address there is much here for the young reader to enjoy. The text is pitched at a level for newly confident readers to be happy with this book as an independent read whilst the use of a two-tone colour palette really brings the dark night to life and sets the scene perfectly for all of Kitty's adventures.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

The Land of Roar

Jenny McLachlan, illus. Ben Mantle, pub. Egmont

When twins Arthur and Rose Trout were little, they were rulers of the fantastical Land of Roar, the imaginary world they created each summer at their grandfather's house. Spanning wild, tangled forests, perilous cliff-faces and snow-topped mountains, Roar was filled with magical creatures and even more magical adventures. But now the twins are eleven, Rose no longer believes in magical places – she's more interested in swiping the screen of her phone. It seems that Roar is almost forgotten... Until, that is, strange things start to happen and the twins are forced to wonder if maybe, just maybe, the magical land of their childhood is real...

The Land of Roar takes place at that very specific point towards the end of childhood when teenagerdom and the terrors of secondary school – here the gigantic Langton Academy – loom large. Rose, the more confident twin, seems to be navigating this change well: she wants to grow up and make new, older friends. There are always some children who manage to cling onto childhood a bit longer, however, and Arthur still enjoys childish games and make-believe, while feeling more and more left behind. Author Jenny McLachlan convincingly suggests his bewilderment and hurt at how Rose has grown up without him: 'Suddenly Rose got her phone and got into Youtube, make-up and her mates and the Rose I knew just sort of disappeared,' he tells us in a page which will resonate with many young readers. The pressures on the sibling relationship, and how it mends and repairs, is drawn particularly well throughout the novel, as is Arthur's growing independence and self-confidence.

But the real draw is ultimately, of course, Roar itself, which is imagined vividly in full technicolour: ‘There were millions of stars in Roar – blue, green, pink, purple,’ Arthur tells us breathlessly, ‘and their light was as warm as the sun.’ There magical creatures, and old friends, such as the charmingly-useless wizard-ninja, Winninja, whose magic is almost as bad as his jokes, and the joyfully feral Lost Girls who have a secret hideout in the Tangled Woods. (Of the magical creatures, furries – ‘tiny furry fairies, basically mice with wings...but with human faces’ – were my favourite.). The wonder of Roar contrasts gently with the trappings of modern tween-hood, rendered here in references to social media, and mobile phones, and Youtubers, but the point is made subtly.

The wistfulness certainly isn’t at the expense of excitement: the story rattles through various escapades and adventures – there is a particularly well-written action-sequence involving a rope-bridge over a gorge – at quite a pace, and the tension is held in place by a suitably-terrifying villain, Croaky the Scarecrow.

The first in a new middle-grade fantasy series, *The Land of Roar* has already won praise among booksellers as the Waterstones’ Book of the Month for August 2019. It is wonderful and wonderfully-fun book about the power of childhood imagination, with a message about the challenges of growing up which will resonate particularly with end-of-primary school and early secondary school-age children. It has been produced in an absolutely beautiful edition, complete with Ben Mantle’s panoramic, sparkling illustrations of Roar which spread from across the front and back covers and then within two fold-out inside pages, which should also help to entice younger readers into *The Land of Roar*.

Olivia Parry

Lori and Max

Catherine O’Flynn, pub. Firefly Press

Lori and Max are our detective duo in this engaging and pacey mystery. Lori is eleven and lives with her Nan. She loves detective stories and wants to be a detective, so she’s honing her skills, solving mysteries like- where are Nan’s glasses? She’s permanently on the look-out for suspicious happenings at home and school.

Max arrives at school as a new girl who has supposedly been expelled from a series of schools. Her appearance is unkempt, bordering on unclean, and her manner is disdainful and can be intimidating. Lori is tasked with looking after Max and gradually they become friends, doing their best to deal with the classroom bully’s determination to pick on Max. Max turns out to be an expert at dealing with bullies but this leads to her being implicated in the theft of money from a charity box in the classroom. Whilst Max is suspended from school pending investigations, a potentially far worse crime is committed and it is up to Lori to use all her sleuthing powers to save her friend.

The story is presented through chapters alternating between Lori and Max. Thus we learn that Lori's parents have died and this is why Nan is bringing her up. Max's home life is chaotic due to her father's gambling addiction and her mother who may be suffering from depression. The actions of her father have resulted in the family being forced to move house repeatedly and have exposed Max and her mother to frightening and threatening behaviour by semi criminal associates of his. Max has had to learn strategies to survive.

There is a lot of charm to this story through its characters and its satisfying conclusion. Children aged 9 plus who like reality-based tales with a bit of mystery, suspense and humour will enjoy it.

Rose Palmer

Max Kowalski Didn't Mean It

Susie Day, pub. Puffin Books

Max Kowalski is the kind of boy who doesn't mean to go looking for trouble because it always just seems to find him anyway. He's always accidentally getting into fights, breaking things or supergluing himself to desks - like boys do. He wants to be just like his dad, Big Pete - brave, strong, capable and sole caregiver since the death of Max's mum. But one day Big Pete disappears leaving Max with a suitcase full of cash and instructions to look after his 3 lively younger sisters. What at first seems like an exciting adventure rapidly becomes a nightmare for Max as he struggles to provide food for his sisters, keep the family together and keep his dad's disappearance a secret. When Max finds a key to a remote empty cottage in Wales belonging to the family of his best friend, he sets off with his sisters to hide out there. This is where the adventure really begins, the tension ramps up a notch and a golden dragon rumoured to live in the mountains seems to promise a way out of their difficulties as well as add a fantastical element to the story.

This is an exceptionally clever book which wraps the important issue of coping with grief and loss in a highly readable and hugely exciting adventure story. Max's situation genuinely reflects the world so many children inhabit with the accompanying challenges of poverty, single parenting and getting by. There is humour too to balance the realism and toughness - in the characters and sibling relationships of Max's sisters - all completely credible characters in their own right.

Max himself is a supremely well-crafted character who instantly wins the reader over: hard on the inside, soft in the middle, still desperately trying to figure himself out, modelling himself on his dad - a man he sees as tough and capable but who is crumbling with grief and running away from his problems as well as his children.

It's a fascinating and sensitive take on family relationships, toxic masculinity and what it means to be a boy today. In Wales Max is helped by Tal, the boy next door, and his two dads, one an accomplished mountain-climber coach and one a baker of cakes, who help him understand that his own dad's expectations are unreasonable and that there can be more than one kind of role model. When Max - and finally his dad - accept the kindness of these strangers and start talking about how they feel then the future seems more hopeful for the family.

This is the perfect book for developing empathy; emotionally intelligent, exciting and very funny too. This book definitely fills a gap in the market for boys (but girls will love it too!) We need more books like this.

Eileen Armstrong

Nevertell

Katharine Orton, illus. Rovina Cai, cover illus. Sandra Dieckmann, pub. Walker Books

I read this twice; that's a first. I'd not read a novel I was reviewing twice before. (Sorry Louise, I didn't mean to be late sending in this review, Katharine made me do it.) You can infer from that where this review will end up. This is a big book. In size (377 pages!), in scale, in themes, in ambition. It's a slow book, unravelling patiently around deep detail, but so efficiently that it was only (!) 377 pages long. I feel that in less craftful hands this could've been a thousand; it feels like I've travelled a thousand pages.

It reminds me of no-one so much as Alan Garner, and I love Alan Garner. It's grounded in convincing locations and mundane interactions. In great emotions and fierce dilemmas – and then the Other intrudes, and it's an Other that feels properly not around here. There's an unfamiliarity to the supernatural elements that's alien, that's true to its Siberian roots.

I'm meandering.

This is a Russian novel. It's fairly convincingly written as if it were an English translation from Russian. There's that slight awkwardness to it. The landscape is huge and oppressive; a thing to be endured, not won over. The setting is a Siberian labour camp in the closing years of Stalinism. Everything is about survival, about seeing the next day.

Our hero is Lina. She and her mother, Katya, are prisoners. Katya engineers Lina's escape so that she might find her grandmother on the outside, in Moscow, and not die in the camp as her uncle and grandfather have done. The opening quarter of the book covers the same kind of ground as *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, and could be a bit dreary for the less dedicated reader were it not that it is so involving: the characters are good, their lives are sharp, the text is evocative.

The second quarter brings in the excitement of the escape, the perils of being on the run, the kind of treachery and paranoia you might expect in Dickens or Robert Louis Stevenson. It's the segment that begins bringing in sorcerous weird forces... We pass into the second half of the book and Lina and her friend and co-escapee Bogdan are pitted against the witch Svetlana and her army of spirits, who is intrigued with Lina, and whom Lina and Bogdan must elude in trying to get to Moscow.

I very much want to avoid spoilers. Sufficient to say the result is a world, no, let's say World, that is complete unto itself and alive, with depth and breadth as well-realised and fresh as Tolkien or Moorcock or Le Guin must have seemed when they were stretching out what fantasy could do. It's not a rehashed blend of tropes masquerading as something new.

I am very impressed.

All the elements of the plot come to satisfying conclusions. All the twists are twisty. Nothing is simplistic. There is even a softly-achieved change of pace after the plot climax that means the last part of the book isn't a rush for the door, but a thing in and of itself.

I don't know that this is a book that'll be immediately very successful, but I think this is a book that will still be being a success in decades' time, when this year's bestsellers are clogging up charity shops. I think it's in with a decent shout of being a trend-setter that inspires copyists. I think it's got enough skill and hook in its opening pages to get most readers through their doubts as to whether they want to read 377 pages of Siberian prison camp, and I would point any child with a Year 5 or better reading ability in its direction.

I love it. But then I think you guessed that in the first paragraph.

Dmytro Bojaniwskyj

The Pearl in the Ice

Cathryn Constable, pub. Chicken House

The Pearl in the Ice offered some welcome escapism from my rather monotonous university reading list. Cathryn Constable's third novel is a sweeping historical adventure that glides effortlessly between realism and marine mythology.

Twelve-year-old Marina has never seen the sea. Her emotionally distant father, a naval commander, has kept her from water all her life for reasons he won't share. Marina suspects that his reticence may be connected to the memory of her mother who mysteriously disappeared many years before. With war on the horizon, her father leaves for sea, condemning Marina to a boarding school for young

ladies. But determined to uncover the truth, Marina stows away on her father's ship and is soon caught up in a world of intrigue and danger...

This novel is superbly atmospheric; Constable's historical detail is immersive and convincing. What I appreciate the most is how the shadow of WW1 only haunts the edges; Marina's coming-of-age story is the focus. The subtle undertones of political turbulence are certainly there, nonetheless. Radio transmitters are being tried and tested in the distant reaches of the north, and the 'new woman' is embodied in the stylish and thrillingly unconventional - though mildly sinister - Miss Smith.

I would be lying if I denied that I was immediately won over by those stunning end pages, but the mystery between them is as equally engrossing and moving. *The Pearl in the Ice* is the perfect winter read, great for fans of Emma Carroll, and best with a blanket and a hot chocolate.

Jess Zahara

The Runaways

Holly Webb, pub. Scholastic Children's Books

A middle-grade evacuee story with a difference. Webb places her story in London in 1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Molly hears that the children in her neighbourhood are being evacuated, and she feels relieved because the war scares her, and living in the city means living in the heart of danger. When her mum refuses to let her go, telling her that she has to stay and help with the war effort, she watches her classmates leave, and then discovers that because of food shortages city dwellers are being advised to have their pets put to sleep. This means that Molly's beloved dog Bertie is now in danger, and so Molly decides to escape from the city. Stowing away on a train, leaving no message for her mother, Molly makes it to the country, but once there she realises that she doesn't know where she is or who to trust.

It's not until Molly comes across two other runaways that she starts to feel safe again. Like Molly, John and Rose have been living rough, sleeping in barns, eating whatever they could find. When John is injured climbing into a garden they are all taken in by 'Auntie Lucy', pregnant and recently widowed and sick with grief. Caring for the children provides her with something to keep her mind off her own sorrows, and she willingly misleads the authorities about her 'evacuees'. Webb shows that not all evacuees found their new homes kind or happy, and Rose has become mute as a result of the physical abuse she suffered. When the local children ridicule her Molly cunningly devises a way to explain Rose's condition which will save her from being bullied. The denouement of Molly's story is unexpected, but ultimately hopeful.

Although we may feel that the storyline of children successfully evading the authorities and remaining as runaways Webb never shirks the need to show her readers the realities of war, and particularly the

fear of the unknown which pervaded the early months of WWII. This engrossing, powerful, exciting adventure is also deeply thoughtful.

Bridget Carrington

Shadows Of Winterspell

Amy Wilson, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

In a book that encapsulates a wintery magic feel – something Amy Wilson is fantastic for (read *A girl called Owl*, *A Far away Magic* and *Snowglobe*) this latest title tells of a girl called Stella who lives on the outskirts of a magical forest with her nan, eager for some company of her own age. Determined to make friends and enjoy experiences with other children Stella starts at the local school and this marks the first step in her journey to discover who she truly is, her family's history and the significance of the forest that she has always lived so closely too and yet never been a part of.

This adventure story is fantastic for confident readers to enjoy, accompanying Stella on a magical fueled adventure that sees many characters from that world feature with these pages, and the world of magic itself feel as though it could be waiting around the next corner for any of us to enter especially as author Amy Wilson makes that realm so realistic, inviting and exciting to enter. Whilst there is a dark side to the story there is also hope and the mentality that good will prevail as Stella and her new friends enter the magic forest and look for answers she never realised the importance of but shows a fierce, admirable determination to uncover the truth.

Samantha Thomas

The Space We're In

Katya Balen, illus. Laura Carlin, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

This is a book about two brothers, five year old Max who is autistic, only eats three food items, hates bright colours and loud noises, and 10 year old Frank who likes cracking codes, football and hanging with his friends Jamie and Ahmed. They live with their parents. Mum is an artist but since Max was born no longer has the time or energy to paint, so her attic studio lies dusty and unused, except as a refuge for Frank when things get tough at home. Dad is a computer coder who goes to work in a suit. To Mum, her boys are “her world...her universe...her space...her sky...her galaxy...her cosmos.” This book gives a vivid insight into the world of autism and is the story of how the family cope with their everyday challenges and more serious challenges that life throws their way.

The text of this book is an unusual combination of words and numbers – literally a code the reader has to crack. The shape and layout of the words and simple drawn illustrations are an expression and

extension of what is going on inside Frank's head as he struggles with his love of his brother and parents against his despair of how difficult Max's arrival has made their life. Frank is a sensitive, intelligent and loving character who we easily empathise with; we want him to be able to hang out with his mates and have a "normal" life, but we also witness the beautiful bond he has with his brother.

This book will break your heart and warm your soul. I could not put it down and I was in tears by the end. If you enjoyed R J Palacio's *Wonder* you will love this book even more.

Rose Palmer

The Taylor Turbochaser

David Baddiel, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books

This sizzler of a book embraces head on the nitty gritty of being disabled, aged 11. Well done to David Baddiel for writing a boundary crossing tale about Amy Taylor, who at the age of 8 loses the use of both legs in a car accident. Amy is a "petrolhead" like her father, a Formula One car designer who endorsed her potential driving skills pre-accident on the dodgem cars, since when Amy has cherished this praise.

A strong backbone of family strength prevails as we are introduced to a delightful group of characters all endearingly human in their strengths and weaknesses. Tried and trusted adages, trite but true, often presented by Amy's mum Suzi, surround them all in a flexible armour. This is achieved without sentimentalism and does not interrupt the pace and momentum of the plot. Sentence construction has been adapted in places, possibly to maintain this pace?

David Baddiel manages to convey the joy of experiencing a powered wheelchair for the first time after struggling with a manual chair to date, establishing the extent of its performance and delighting in its spontaneity. We experience Amy's joy as she whizzes up and down the ramp of their transit van, or twizzles round in tight circles on the spot, but most importantly her ability to choose who or what she will come in contact with.

Believe in yourself and the rest will fall into place, chin up and get on with it, are prevailing themes. "One thing I never do is use my legs as an excuse" says Amy. The reader is left in no doubt, if Amy can do it so can you. "Trust your instincts they will never betray you" is advised.

8 - 11 year olds will enjoy this book. A reluctant reader may just be sufficiently captivated to keep on reading, bowled along by the pace of events, itching to see what happens in the end. Brilliant family reading, a few chapters each night perhaps. An ideal gift for Christmas providing non-stop entertainment even for those duller moments when coerced into being with the relatives.

Here we have disability faced head on albeit in a surreal rollercoaster setting. The licence to dream is not the privilege of just able bodied folk, and this book fills that gap.

Elizabeth Negus

The Time of Green Magic

Hilary McKay, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

Abi's life is changing, and in ways she doesn't like. Her beloved dad Theo is re-marrying. Her wonderful Granny Grace, who has always been there for her since her mother's death when she was ten, is moving back to Jamaica. From being an only child, she now faces being one of three, with two annoying brothers, one older, one younger. Parting from the flat she has always called home and squashing into her step-family's small house is wrenching and disorienting. Abi retreats further and further into her books. They and her Granny Grace's letters are her solace. But then she finds herself tumbling into her books – becoming part of them. When the family moves into an old ivy-covered house with a Narnia lantern, Abi is happier, but her book tumbles keep happening. Strangely, Louis, her new younger brother, for whom the house is scary, seems to experience some of what she sees. When the boys' mother Polly goes away to work abroad so that they have enough money to pay the rent, other mysterious things start to happen. There is a peculiar, disturbing being who appears and disappears. Louis is initially comforted by a strange creature that appears on his bed. At first he thinks it's an owl, but then it appears to be a cat. It grows and grows. It's no longer comforting. It's very frightening. Theo is not aware of it, but to Abi, Louis and older brother Max, it is terrifying. They have no choice but to cooperate to rid free themselves of from all the sinister happenings they are caught up in.

This is a haunting, lyrically written, brilliant book. The portrayal of the difficult emotional journeys Abi and her brothers make is sensitive and realistic. Readers will readily relate to Abi and her stand-offish ways of dealing with the pains of loss and change. Louis's loneliness and vulnerability and Max's turbulent teenage feelings are very well depicted. The peculiar ivy-clad house with its unsettling visitors and events is singularly characterful. There is magic in this book in more senses than one.

Anne Harding

Uki and the Outcasts

Kieran Larwood, pub. Faber & Faber

This is another book in the Podkin saga and the latest addition to the *Five Realms* series. Fans will be familiar with the overlapping story, but to keep our interest there are some new characters. Uki is the

main character and an unlikely hero. He has been rejected by his village and left to die. He is joined by two other outcasts, a trained assassin who refuses to kill people and a very short rabbit who rides the fastest jerboa on the plains.

It is a gripping tale for children who enjoy fantasy, adventure and rabbits. The author, Kieran Larwood, always loved fantasy stories and enjoyed reading *The Hobbit* as a boy. As well as all the action and excitement, this book also deals with issues like bullying and self-worth.

Wulf the Wanderer, the Master Bard, shares his stories and adventures with his fellow rabbit inhabitants of the Five Realms. The Bard says 'you have to let the story build up. A good story comes to the boil slowly, just like a good vegetable stew'. Another character is Rue, the Bard's apprentice. There are rumours of strange activity at a long abandoned tower. The Bard and Rue make a difficult journey to the tower.

There are some scary bits, as the story covers the battle between good and evil, but there is plenty of fantastic adventure, which children will love. Excellent illustrations by David Wyatt are made up of some brilliant black and white artwork.

The series is probably best read in order, but don't be put off this latest one if you haven't read the earlier books in the saga.

Gary Kenworthy

White Fox

Chen Jiatong, trans. Jennifer Feeley, illus. Viola Wang, pub. Chicken House

The back cover of Chicken House books offers a three-word summary of what's inside: the three words that sum up *White Fox* are: magical, animal and quest. It is, quite simply, a magical animal quest. Published in China in 2014, it's a bestseller there. The translation is smooth and lyrical, as I imagine the original would have been; the story picks up the reader and gallops along with them, breathless and exciting.

We meet Dilah, a white Arctic fox, snuggled up warm with his mother's tail around him, in a burrow deep beneath the Arctic Circle, listening to much-loved myths and stories of heroic and legendary foxes from the past. But by the end of the first chapter (spoiler alert), he has heard her last ever story. She and Dilah's father are killed by hunters and young Dilah is alone in the world – he has an older brother he's never met, but no-one else. His mother's last story, as she lay dying, was a new one; a tale of a magical moonstone that has the power to change animals into humans. She told Dilah where to find that same moonstone, buried deep in their burrow, before she died.

Dilah, who's always been fascinated with the lives of humans, sets out on a quest to find out how the moonstone can help him become human. Along the way, he unlocks the mysteries of the magical gem and the riddles written on its pouch. He makes friends, narrowly escapes enemies, has heart-stopping adventures and – whenever he can – watches humans, realising that not all of them are nice. Is he still sure that he wants to become human? Does he find the special enchanted place of Ulla, the patron saints of foxes, where his dreams could come true?

I won't spoil the ending – because I can't. Find out what happens in the sequel...

White Fox is a fast-paced, magical tale of friendship, hardship, bravery, betrayal and adventure. A must-read for animal lovers from age 8 upwards.

Antonia Russell

The Wind in the Wall

Sally Gardner, illus. Rovina Cai, pub. Bonnier Books

A visually attractive large format book by multi award-winning Sally Gardner offers older middle grade readers a brand new folk tale with a dark denouement.

The book jacket entices the reader, with a night time view of a building with a cupola like a pineapple centred between golden plants bearing a pineapple, plants which grow from a wall and twine up and round the sides of the image. Pineapple and wall are the crux of this blood-chilling tale, and illustrator Rovina Cai perfectly captures the weird, wonderful and terrifying quality of the story. Set in a stately home in the eighteenth century, a Duke sets his gardener the task of growing pineapples, introduced from tropical countries, something almost impossible to achieve in the bleak climate of northern Britain. When the pineapples fail to thrive the gardener is replaced by the mysterious Mr Amicus who successfully grows the coveted plants. However the gardener suspects Amicus is a trickster, and sneaks into the pineapple house to spy on him and the large covered bird cage he brought with him. What he finds there horrifies but intrigues him, and his fate is set.

Although Gardner's tale is new, inspired when she was writer in residence at Alnwick Castle in Northumberland, one of the many stately homes which, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries created great gardens in which they cultivated pineapples and other exotic plants to indicate their wealth, to impress rival landowners, and in particular for suitors to attract a wife appropriate to their status.

Gardner's folk/fairy tale/myth/fable is in a long and splendid tradition of twisted tales, with an unsettling message to be careful what you wish for. Alnwick's hothouse no longer exists. Instead Cai has used the 4th Earl of Dunmore's summerhouse near Stirling to represent the hothouse in Gardner's tale. This fantastic building, known now as The Pineapple, and its grounds, are in the care

of the National Trust for Scotland, and visitable, while the Landmark Trust offer it as one of its quirky historic holiday lets. It's a great pity that this isn't credited in the book.

Bridget Carrington

With the Fire on High

Elizabeth Acevedo, illus. Erick Davila, pub. Hot Key Books

Emoni Santiago is THAT girl. The one your parents warned you about. The walking bad example. Whispered about in the halls at school. Pregnant at fourteen. But she's also so much more. She's a friend, a grand-daughter, a mother and a cook. A proud Philly girl with a Puerto Rican father (who has always chosen to live there, giving back to his community) and a "straight from the Carolinas" black mother, who died when she was born.

With the Fire on High starts in Emoni's final year of high school, three years after she gave birth to Emma (who she calls Babygirl and raises alone with her abuela). With her daughter in daycare, she's back at school, taking an option called 'Culinary Arts'. Emoni has always loved to cook. She watches all the cooking shows she can, cooks every day and loves nothing more than wandering around supermarkets looking at all the different foods, especially spices. And she has a talent: her food can evoke powerful memories and emotions in the people eating it (older readers will be reminded of *Like Water for Chocolate* – there's recipes dotted throughout this book, too). Her cooking technique is instinctive and adventurous, something which doesn't go down well with the chef trying to instruct her in following recipes.

Told in the first person, the book follows Emoni through the trials of her last year at school, earning money to pay for daycare, fundraising for a Culinary Arts field trip to Spain, dealing with Emma's father and the pain of him taking Babygirl away for weekends, worrying about her grandmother's health, missing her father. But – refreshingly – this is no moralistic tale, warning of the dangers of teen pregnancy. *With the Fire on High* just tells a story of a girl it happened to, and what she is doing to deal with how her life turned out. There are highs as well as lows, joy as well as sadness, friendships new and old, amazing experiences and not a little drama.

The text is rich in cultural tone and reference, naturally utilising both foreign and slang words between Emoni, her family and her peers (I had to look several words up – a great learning experience!). The New York Times called it "literary soul food".

This is Elizabeth Acevedo's second book; her first, *The Poet X*, was written in verse and won the 2018 National Book Award for Young People's Literature and many other awards, including one recognising her positive portrayal of Latin culture. Based on the subject matter, I'd recommend this for older readers, from age 11; it would be a great book to kick off all sorts of discussions, around teen

pregnancy, solo parenting, cultural difference, cooking, what makes a family, and following your dreams.

Antonia Russell

Young Adult Book Reviews

Aphra's Child

Lesley Glaister, pub. Stone Cold Fox

Lesley Glaister has more than a dozen adult novels to her credit, largely psychological thrillers, well-plotted, intricate and often dark. Now she has embarked on the Chimera Trilogy, with *Aphra's Child* being the first of an intriguing alternative history/fantasy novels for young adults.

In Greek mythology a chimera was a creature which had different physical and character attributes of several animals. Glaister envisages a civilization in which those who we would recognize as human are the ruling class, while a variety of creatures, part animal part human, are essentially slaves forming a working class which serves the humans. The main character in this novel, Tula, has been brought up by her mother Aphra in a cottage in a remote highland glen, hidden from even the nearest village. This is for a very good reason, as while Aphra is a human, Tula is a chimera. As relationships between humans and chimeras are banned, Aphra, once a renowned singer adored by the public, disappeared in order to raise her child. Unlike the working chimeras (known by the derogatory term 'kims' by their owners) who are clearly seen to be part animal part human, Tula has only a tail to show that she is not fully human, and when her mother is kidnapped by human marauders, Tula is able to hide her true identity when she sets out to find who her mother might be, and who her chimera-descended father was. Once in the city, a potentially hostile and dangerous place for her, she discovers that not only are the 'kims' generally badly treated, and despised, even a food source, but that in the imminent election, one political party plans to exterminate them. Together with Rob, a human teenager fighting with an undercover organisation determined to save the chimeras, Tula continues her own personal quest for identity, and justice for her own race.

Exciting, engrossing, powerfully written, this novel references not only past genocides all over the world, but also the horrifying twenty-first century rise in hatred of the 'other', anyone with a different appearance or beliefs to those in power.

Bridget Carrington

The Austen Girls

Lucy Worsley, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Lucy Worsley is an engaging interpreter of the past when seen on television, and, with several well-researched non-fiction books for adults already published, she has now ventured into historical novels. *The Austen Girls* is her fourth for younger readers, and it focuses on two of Jane Austens'

nieces. Fanny was the eldest daughter of Jane's brother Edward, who had inherited Godmersham, a large estate in Kent, from a distant relative. The other niece is Anna, daughter of Jane's oldest brother, James, who followed his father as rector at the much less grand at Steventon Rectory, Jane's home in Hampshire. At the age of two Anna lost her mother, and because she doesn't much like her step mother she spends as much time as she can with Fanny at Godmersham. The girls are both sixteen, about to 'come out', and be seen as young women seeking a husband. Worsley describes this convention and the girls' desperation to attract suitors as quickly as possible. Anna is outgoing, bold and outspoken. She becomes engaged, while Fanny fears she will never attract a suitor, especially when the one man she likes, Mr Drummer, is a clergyman, not a choice her parents would approve. When Mr Drummer is accused of stealing, faced with deportation to Australia, things look very bleak for her. But Aunt Jane, a quiet, somewhat secretive but feisty frequent guest at Godmersham, counsels both girls, and takes Fanny under her wing, in order to investigate poor Mr Drummer's plight.

As a novel for middle-grade/YA readers this is an entertaining read, with the heroines expressing themselves more like twenty-first-century girls than those of the early nineteenth. There is some good historical detail about the life of people at this time, the very different conditions for the moderately rich and the poor, with marriage very different from the choices girls can make today. All entertaining stuff, but I'm sure readers would welcome a much more detailed Epilogue ('What happened in real life') than that Worsley provides, together with a bibliography which would allow them to understand the Austen family and their times more fully.

Bridget Carrington

The Beautiful

Renée Ahdieh, pub. G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Reader

Seventeen-year-old Celine Rousseau flees her life in Paris to escape from a crime she committed and make a fresh start in a convent in New Orleans. Soon, she is entranced by the city of contrasts—from the beauty, music and food; to secrets, danger and the underworld. When Celine inadvertently catches the eye of Sébastien Saint Germain, the leader of La Cour des Lions, she unwittingly enters a place where nothing is quite as it seems. As brutal murders curse the city, they seem to have a connection to Celine and draw the killer—whatever it may be—closer and closer to her. Determined to take fate into her own hands, Celine creates a trap that leads everyone she knows and loves into the midst of danger and uncovers a centuries old family feud that bridges the human and demon worlds.

In the enchanting setting of 1800s New Orleans, *The Beautiful* is at once a violent murder mystery and passionate young romance rolled into one. Through the eyes of a young, headstrong seamstress with admirable strength and wit balanced by realistic flaws and missteps, readers enter a dark world that holds far more questions than answers. From the moment we meet Celine, we know there are

mysteries about her past life, long-held secrets about her family and vast uncertainty about her future. But we cheer for her as she struggles through her new life and the horrors that fall upon her. The mysteriously powerful Cour des Lions sets an eerie tone to the lavish society that Celine finds herself in and creates ample twists throughout the story. It is up to Celine to trap the killer before it hurts anyone else she knows.

Interview with a Vampire meets *Twilight* in this atmospheric novel with an intriguing heroine at its heart. Highly readable and always entertaining, *The Beautiful* has elements of a great YA novel and leaves the reader to put the pieces together. Many questions are left unanswered, likely to leave room for the saga of Celine and Sebastien to continue.

Stephanie Ward

Call Down The Hawk

Maggie Stiefvater, pub. Scholastic Children's Books

Unpicking the separation between dream and reality, this is an excitingly frightening but also thought provoking story. It is crafted by Stiefvater to follow many varied characters down their differing paths, but these trajectories may not be as far apart as they seem...

Rowan's character is one of several central voices in the novel, with Stiefvater using his presence to examine the anguish and emotional strain accompanying life as a 'dreamer'. Rowan's experiences, treading this line between dreamt and waking worlds, quickly begin to entwine the supernatural power of his identity with many moral dilemmas and complications.

Threat abounds both externally and internally, with the dreamer left on edge for fear of both their own self and the hostility of a 'real world', that would consider itself distinct from those who challenge its parameters...

The concept of Dreamers is intriguing, and wrenching when their great skill comes with excruciating sadness: dreaming may push a waking lover too far from reach. The novel also excels in difficult family dynamics, and the fierce but volatile bonds possible between siblings. So too is Jordan's storyline one of great effect, with this skilled artist searching for relief from a very troublesome recurring nightmare. Many of the characters face problems that feel stifling, and reality as we know it may too be under threat, but with real/not real blurring, more possibilities for change may lie in wait. Hopefully this novel will lead its readers to many interesting dreams of their own...

Jemima Breeds

Chessboxer

Stephen Davies, pub. Andersen Press

Our central protagonist is New York based Leah, aka Chessgirl. Her hothouse stella chess performance is the result of precocious talent, nagging from her mother and nagging from her coach. Eventually, she crashes out of the endless cycle of international tournaments and finds a job in a doughnut shop, much to her mother's chagrin. Here she meets customer Kit, who runs an informal group of talented chess players - the Poison Pawns, (great name!). the group uses the public tables in Central Park to play for cash. Chessgirl cannot resist the invitation to join the group and make use again of her talents. Playing for profit is illegal. So, after her dazzling defeat of a retired Grand Master, videoed for YouTube, she is arrested. At the trial, Leah finds a legal exception and is released.

Leah is then introduced to Chess Boxing. This high-pressure competition requires participants to alternate between a round of boxing and a timed chess match against the same opponent. Leah excels and wins the competition. She then tours Vegas and related hot spots.

If you like chess symbols and endless descriptions of matches, and, exciting, but interminable punch by punch accounts of confrontations, you might enjoy *Chessboxer*. The format uses blogs, lists and more extended prose which makes Leah's story accessible. Although she is presented as a determined, hard-bitten female teen, we know little more about her by the end. Is she a good role model? Is boxing an acceptable, safe sport? The book's greatest weaknesses are its failure to address these ethical issues, and, it's harrowing length and limited range. The last quarter is far too long and gives yet more of the same Leah-defying the odds on the boards move by move, blow by blow.

Trevor Arrowsmith

The Deathless Girls

Kiran Millwood Hargrave, pub. Orion Children's Books

Determined to celebrate the female voice, the Bellatrix books are Hachette Children's Group's response to the untold and forgotten stories of female characters in literature. The diverse YA collection, written by a fantastic group of female authors, aims to tell the whole story of their female protagonists. *The Deathless Girls*, Millwood Hargrave's first YA novel, tells the story of the brides of Dracula.

On the day of their seventeenth birthday – the day of their divining, Lil and Kizzy's whole world is turned upside down. They arrive home from a morning spent foraging to find their traveller community has been ravaged and burned. Captured by mysterious men wearing scarlet sashes, the twin sisters are taken to work as slaves in the castle of Boyar Valcar. There they meet Mira, a fellow

slave, who Lil is drawn to in ways she doesn't quite understand. They also learn about the mythical Dragon, a terrifying man they believed only existed in a story, who accepts girls as gifts.

This beautifully written gothic story had me gripped from the very start. I have loved Stoker's *Dracula* for many years and this is the perfect, feminist, reimagining of the 'dark sisters'. The female characters are strong and multi-faceted and their story is intoxicating. Millwood Hargrave has certainly achieved 'Bellatrix's admirable aims and gifted these women a life beyond Dracula's lines'. I highly recommend you sink your teeth into this captivating tale of bravery, passion, love and loss; you won't be able to put it down.

Abby Mellor

Deeplight

Frances Hardinge, illus. Oslo Davis, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

As a big fan of Frances Hardinge's *The Lie Tree* (winner of the Costa Award), I wondered if she could continue her award-winning style of writing with her new title *Deeplight*. I was not disappointed! *Deeplight* takes place in a deeply troubled world where gods are merciless creatures who rule the seas. After a great battle it appears that the gods are no more, as only parts of their ripped bodies are left for islanders to find and potentially sell. These items are known as godware and are imbibed with the magic of the gods.

There are many secrets and mysteries to be discovered and Hardinge creates a flawed hero, Hark, who tries to do the right thing even if it's for the wrong reasons. His relationship with his best friend, Jelt, is at times painful to the reader, who is pulled into the world of the Myriad to both pity and judge the characters and their actions.

The illustrations by Oslo Davis are a perfect accompaniment to the story. They add to the dark mythological feel of *Deeplight* and the image of each god, whether it be sharp-toothed, crablike or a shape never seen before, help to bring the story to life. No matter what the gods look like, there is a fanaticism in the belief held in them by humans.

There are plenty of twists and it's a pacy, exciting read. It would be suitable for both sexes, with a strong male and female lead character. I would say this is aimed at 14 years and over as it has Young Adult themes.

Due to the pace of the story *Deeplight* would make a good class read. The illustrations could be used as prompts with the class, as it would take a few readings to complete the text. An interesting exercise would be to explore what makes a monster and to create a monster picture complete with description (as is done at the back of the book).

This novel explores: friendship, being indebted, slavery, being an orphan, family, trust, being yourself, death, mourning and deafness. The use of sign language, which differs from island to island, is a clever touch. It is a badge of pride to be deaf, especially if you become deaf from salvaging in the seas. Those who are injured in some way by their sea quests are honoured and respected. I thought this was a clever portrayal of how people can view others. I'm already looking forward to Frances Hardinge's next book!

Sophie Castle

The End and Other Beginnings

Veronica Roth, illus. Ashley Mackenzie, pub. HarperCollins Children's Books

This is an amazing collection of science fiction short stories by best selling author of *Divergent*, Veronica Roth. Each of the six stories has a distinct and imaginative setting in extraordinary other-worlds but share recognizable human 'dramas' involving love, loss, memory and healing that their cast of characters must navigate. It is very difficult to say which story appeals the most!

In *Inertia* the premise of a visitation, a procedure that allows two people to revisit shared memories, holds the promise of analysing and, perhaps, acknowledging mistakes made during one's lifetime. An appealing idea and also one that recognises how each human can interpret events in completely different ways, altering the course of their lives as a result.

The Spinners offers a more complex and ambiguous narrative that explores the fragility of the human body: in this story, the main character seeks to revenge the death of her bounty-hunter mother by annihilating an extraterrestrial race that use humans as host bodies.

Hearken was a truly unusual story of a select few humans that can hear and record the life and death songs of people. The main character, Darya, must choose between the two – life or death – with her choice potentially costing her the company of her family.

Vim and Vigor focused more on common teenage angst of dating, family relationships and friendships with futuristic tech playing a small role in clarifying what was important in life. The final two stories are both set in the same universe, *Carve the Mark*.

Armoured Ones (a two-part story) is by far less futuristic but reveals the inherent nature of humans when cast in roles of captor and prisoner. In both the leads, Teka and Akos, wish to redefine their lives yet seek recompense for wronged family members. The tales unfold beautifully with a slow burn.

The Transformationist is a poignant story of an imprisoned youth unjustly accused of murder. Instead of telling the truth that would release him, he blithely accepts his sentence until an apparent stranger steps forward.

With all these stories, the reader is left wanting more as the characters and worlds are captivating. The book is also beautifully illustrated by Ashley Mackenzie, which adds to the pleasure of reading this collection.

Sheri Sticpewich

The Fountains of Silence

Ruta Sepetys, pub. Penguin Random House Children's Books

Astonishing! This gripping and revelatory YA novel should be in every secondary school and public library.

While there are numerous novels for young and YA readers about the two World Wars, the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath has rarely tempted children's authors, Michael Morpurgo's *Toro! Toro!* being a notable exception. Even fewer write about the effect of the winning Franco regime which ruled Spain until the fascist dictator died in 1975. In her latest historical novel award-winning US author Ruta Sepetys seeks to fill this gaping chasm in readers' knowledge, setting her characters in Madrid in 1957, at the height of Franco's power. Interspersed with contemporary news reports, and appended with a Spanish/English glossary, photographs and historical notes and details of sources and resources, this is a beautifully written, immensely readable, serious and compelling work.

Privileged seventeen-year-old Daniel has accompanied his parents while his father, a Texan oil magnate, seeks to conclude a business deal. Staying in luxury in the Castellana Hilton hotel, his family is assigned a maid, Ana, whose life could not differ more from the rich tourists she serves. Daniel is a talented photographer, and searches for opportunities for images of authentic Spanish life for his portfolio. Alternating with Daniel's story is that of Ana's wider family, educated socialists who fought against Franco's ultimately victorious right-wing troops, and who therefore now live in a slum township, in extreme poverty, constantly afraid of reprisal from the Civil Guards, Franco's vicious military police.

Central to Sepetys' story is identity, and she highlights the scandal, still today unresolved, of the widespread silent, secret sale of almost half a million 'orphan' babies of left-wing and 'transgressive' mothers to rich, right-wing Franco-supporting parents. As Daniel and Ana grow closer, we become increasingly aware of each character's individual search for their identity, for truth, and for the hidden past within their own families. The final seventy pages of this superb 800+-page love-story brings us

to 1975/6, immediately after Franco's death, and offers resolution not only to Daniel and Ana, but to those in Spain who still search for their silenced family story.

Bridget Carrington

Frankly in Love

David Yoon, pub. Penguin Random House Children's Books

Frank Li is in his own words a Limbo, an Korean/American kid who finds himself caught between his parents and their traditional expectations and his Californian upbringing. His parents expect him to only date Korean girls which is difficult for him as he has fallen in love with Brit means a white American girl.

His best friend Joy Song has exactly the same problem, she has fallen in love with an Chinese/American boy so they come up with the idea of pretending to date each other. Soon Frank is starting to doubt all his beliefs and soon starts to understand his parents more and their beliefs.

This book covers many overlapping themes which are interwoven with the story. It is about racism (with a particular focus on the racism between the Korean and Americans), a person's first love, family beliefs and a person's cultural heritage. This book deals with a lot of issues that many people have, it addresses them within the safety of a story and it gives the opportunity to understand them in a safe environment. Questions many young people may have about the issues addressed are dealt with sympathetically and in a manner which may help them gain a greater understanding of their place in a wider, multi-cultural society.

Although I enjoyed reading this book I felt that I was too old for this book and my children are too young, I would say that the book is definitely suited to a young adult audience.

Helen Byles

Free Lunch

Rex Ogle, pub. Norton Young Readers

This book is essentially the author's own memoir, presented in novel form, of a particular period in his life when he started middle school, having been enrolled by his mother onto the free lunch programme. It is an American story which resonates internationally.

Eleven year old Rex is excited about starting middle school. He loves to learn, but also, school is a safe place for him, away from a neglectful and violent home life. His volatile and intimidating mother is scraping along the bottom, dependant on state benefits (such as they are) and her violent partner,

Sam. Together they have a two year old called Ford, Rex's half brother who he looks out for and tries to shield from the worst of the violence. Rex is painfully aware of their poverty and is anxious to hide the nature of his home life from outsiders, suffering crippling shame. Hence his mortification on discovering that he has been enrolled for free lunches.

The story follows his first semester, charting his struggles to navigate life in a school dominated by privileged youngsters, to make and maintain friendships, against a background of privation, neglect and violence. This is not a comfortable read – in fact often downright painful. There are few likeable characters – Rex himself, his estranged grandmother, his baby brother, his new friend Ethan. It could justly be described as a misery memoir. Its unflinchingly harsh realism is hard to take but difficult to deny although, self-evidently, Rex did manage to overcome his tough start and make a success of his life.

I would not recommend this book to readers younger than 14.

Rose Palmer

Full Disclosure

Camryn Garrett, pub. Penguin Random House Children's Books

Simone is a lively, talented, smart seventeen year old. She loves musical theatre and hanging out with her friends. Her two dads (she was adopted as a baby) can be embarrassing, but whose parents aren't? She's recently moved schools but she's settled well, found good friends in Lydia and Claudia and is busy directing a performance of the school musical, Rent. Which is where she gets the chance to spend time with the lovely Miles. He's witty, attractive and he seems to like her back – why else would he have kissed her?

But then she finds the note in her locker. The anonymous, threatening note: I know you have HIV. You have until Thanksgiving to stop hanging out with Miles. Or everyone else will know too.

This is Simone's secret. This is why she had to leave her last school. This is what she doesn't want people to know. Least of all Miles. After all, she's lived with the virus all her life. She takes her meds. She goes to all her check ups and – reluctantly – to a support group. But things are different now. She's starting to think about becoming sexually active. And who wants to go out with a girl for whom the safest sex is no sex at all?

This is a frank, readable novel, very upfront about female desire and sexuality. The author is very young, still in her teens, and like S.E. Hinton before her, this shows in a kind of earnest coolness, but I enjoyed the book for all that. I found it slow at the start but then became sucked into the story and the

voice. Simone is brave and determined: ‘My HIV isn’t a threat to you, but your ignorance is a threat to me.’

The book’s message – you can’t get away from the fact that it has one – in no way takes away from the reading experience. This is a fine novel about an important topic.

Sheena Wilkinson

The Good Hawk

Joseph Elliott, pub. Walker Books

In an alternative version of ancient Scotland, Agatha and Jamie, misfits in their clan, are driven by cruel circumstances to save their friends and clansfolk. Their adventures are harsh and gruelling and they need all their gifts of courage and ingenuity to survive and succeed.

Agatha and Jamie are interesting protagonists though the present tense narrative limits the more subtle nuances of characterisation. The background is convincing: bleak and cold but at times rather beautiful. The action is brisk and the storyline moves along at a steady pace.

Readers will need strong stomachs as the violence begins early with Jamie and his nine year old bride witnessing the heart being torn from a living hare and divided in two. The children are then forced to eat the raw organ. There are then beheadings, stabbings, sliced off limbs, shattered faces and skulls, and blood and brains splattered liberally around. The climax peaks with a bloodbath as the enemy are destroyed in a final confrontation awash with gore.

It’s interesting that Agatha is a Down’s child and though I am not qualified to comment on the accuracy of her portrayal it was intriguing to read about her invaluable contribution to the rescue of her people and her special gift of being able to communicate with animals.

Gill Vickery

The Good Luck Girls

Charlotte Nicole Davis, pub. Hot Key Books

This book is set in a dystopian world which has strong echoes of the American West, and of slavery – so as you may imagine, it is not an easy read. At its centre are two sisters, Clementine and Aster, who are workers in a ‘welcome house’ – in fact a brothel. They are dustbloods, members of an underclass, and have been effectively sold by their family to the welcome house, with the promise that they will at least have enough to eat.

On her first ‘working’ night, Clem accidentally kills her customer. Aster is determined to save her from the consequences of this act, and with three other girls, they manage to make their escape. But the odds against them are high: each working girl has a sort of magical tattoo on her face which will always identify her for what she is: their only hope of escaping recognition and capture is to seek out the legendary Lady Ghost, who alone, it is said, can remove the tattoos.

To survive, despite all those who will hunt them down without mercy, the girls have to become desperadoes, a sort of bandit band. They rob banks and kill those who get in their way, because that’s the only way they can survive.

It’s a tense and exciting story. It wasn’t for me: I found it too bleak, too violent, and I didn’t somehow warm to the character of Aster, from whose point of view most of the story is told – brave and determined and caring as she is. But that shouldn’t put off other readers – I imagine that fans of *The Hunger Games* might like this book too.

Sue Purkiss

Guts

Raina Telgemeier, pub. Scholastic Children’s Books

At first, Raina isn’t overly worried when she wakes up feeling poorly. With her mum suffering too she convinces herself it’s just a bug. Unlike her mum though, Raina’s tummy trouble keeps coming back, coinciding with the ups and downs of school life, friendships, frenemies and fallouts. Raina’s increasing anxiety and stress manifest themselves as nausea and stomach aches, food issues and phobias until finally, as the disorder threatens to take over her life, a helpful therapist gives Raina coping mechanisms to combat her fears.

Guts is a deceptively simple graphic memoir based on the author’s personal experience of clinical anxiety. The stunning emoji cover design makes it irresistibly pickyable. The bright colours and simple features of the comic book style are instantly appealing but carry real expression, emotional honesty and psychological depth. Telgemeier doesn’t spare the reader any of the queasy details of her story but still manages to be brilliantly funny too. Thought bubbles show the reader exactly how Raina feels, crowding in on the page to illustrate the extent of her anxiety and its claustrophobic effects. Clever use of panel space and colour serve to intensify the crushing emotions Raina feels. As in all the very best graphic novels, text is kept to a minimum and the pictures are allowed to tell the story, drawing the reader in.

In less skilled hands, this kind of story could easily come across as preachy but Telgemeier’s account is completely non-judgmental and presents techniques helpful in dealing with anxiety, empowering

fellow sufferers to feel less alone and helping others understand just how it feels to experience anxiety and panic attacks.

Raina is a gutsy character, much more than her anxiety too - a fully formed, cool character readers will warm to, passionate about comics and drawing and able to use her talents to help others.

With mental health problems on the increase in young people, *Guts* is just one of the ways we can help, tackling mental wellness head on, destigmatising therapy and empowering children to talk about their feelings. *Guts* is perfectly pitched for tweenage readers but is, in fact, a book for everyone; anxiety sufferers and their friends, families, carers, teachers, therapists. It is a real and very reassuring conversation starter about facing your fears and finding ways to cope. It is a book for keen readers, for comics enthusiasts and for those who think that reading just isn't for them.

Despite constantly topping the bestseller charts in the US, Telgemeier's books are massively underrated and undersold in the UK. Don't just buy this one buy *Smile*, *Sisters*, *Drama* and *Ghosts* too.

Eileen Armstrong

Illegal

Miriam Halahmy, pub. Troika Books

I think one of the main strengths of *Illegal* is the author Miriam Harahmy's choice to describe the contemporary life of a girl whose world is really uncertain and hard. Lindy Bellows' family is financially insecure, with two sons in prison, a father struggling with gambling addiction, and a mother seemingly overwhelmed into silence and denial, after the death of her baby Jemma.

Isolated, misunderstood, and suicidal, Harahmy depicts a vulnerable, angry, and extremely relied upon young female heroine, acting as carer for her brother Sean and Jemma in the absence of her parents. Like the Hamlet of her English lessons who she identifies with, Lindy feels plagued by guilt after the death of her sister. Readers will get to know Lindy somewhat through a first-person narrative that accompanies the third-person voice (which could be a useful tool for readers and writers to explore different types of narrator).

Lindy's vulnerable situation sets the scene for a story which is dramatic, dangerous, also exciting, and at times pushing at the boundaries of plausibility. It begins with her cousin Colin offering Lindy and the family a way of her making money: though Lindy's gut tells her to stay away, she soon finds herself under his thumb, and becomes further and further trapped into maintaining his cannabis plantation and drug-dealing business.

But her escape from this world of unsafety leads her to the most unexpected of friendships: if beauty can grow in hard places, then the relationship that blooms between Lindy and selective mute (and fellow pupil) Karl is just that. In each other they find a strong resource and solidarity, and a bringing back into speech for Karl when Lindy is on the edge of life.

Overall, I would like to see more richness and depth of psychological exploration in such a novel. I feel Miriam Harahmy has used an important, relevant, and obviously personally pertinent sociological context to explore a story whose coordinates, however, I feel may have already been mapped out and may sound familiar: villains who remain villains, action sequences with far-fetched resolutions, and dialogue that can feel functional, for example. And I wonder also at the opportunities for exploring, within young adult fiction, that special resource of the writer - language itself! - at the same time as exploring important stories of our time. Yet this is a personal reflection and it must be said, nevertheless, that this is a real-life, exciting contemporary story.

Laurence Tidy

In the Key of Code

Aimee Lucido, pub. Walker Books

I wasn't sure what to expect from this text as it's very different to anything I have read before (although it does remind me of Sarah Crossan's poetic prose). I'm still not sure I fully understand code and coding, but the amalgamation of music and code in the story is beautifully written. The story focuses on 12-year-old Emmy, who has moved to a new town due to her father's role in the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. Emmy has musical parents, but doesn't share their talent for music, no matter how hard she tries. Emmy feels lost and friendless at her new school, until she tries Computer Science.

In the Key of Code conveys the loneliness and difficulties of fitting in at a new school. It does this in a unique way through music, computer code and poetry. It's refreshing to see woman and girls positively represented within the subject of IT and shows it can be for anyone regardless of age or gender.

The glossary at the end was very useful and words within the text were highlighted to show that the meanings were at the back of the book. This meant that the flow of the writing wasn't disturbed as the meanings of words can be checked later and a passage reread after checking the glossary.

Coding has become an important component within schools and it's good to see it being explored within a story. The book is well researched and the author's enthusiasm for the subject shines through. Children and Young People are reminded that they can be interested in lots of things, they

don't have to choose just one interest. The book also covers subjects such as: fitting in, friendship, family, expectations, illness, gender roles, school life and being yourself.

I'd recommend using this book with reluctant readers – as the text is presented in poetry form it is simple to read but holds much deeper meanings through simple text. This is a text for KS2/KS3 (from Year 5 and upwards). It would appeal to both genders but has strong female characters which would be useful to use if exploring gender roles and stereotypes.

Sophie Castle

Into the Crooked Place

Alexandra Christo, illus. Patrick Knowles, pub. Hot Key Books

Into the Crooked Place is written from four distinct points of view and has a theme of trust. The characters each have flaws and redeeming qualities. Tavia is a street busker who is selling dark magic and charms illegally. She desires to escape the city and the life debt she owes the Kingpin. Her childhood friend, Wesley, is now her underboss and leads a gangster lifestyle. His bodyguard is Karam and she is making a formidable name for herself by fighting in the rings. Tavia's best friend is Saxony. She is a freedom fighter and falls in love with Karam. She wants revenge on the people who destroyed her family. These loveable characters, each with their own agenda, form an unlikely alliance to save the city of Creije from the cruel Kingpin.

Alexandra Christo really captures the characters different personalities through her use of dialogue and the entertaining exchanges often made me laugh out loud. Each have their own heart-wrenching dramatic past, which adds to the tension and plot. The city of Creije is well developed and creates a vivid, dramatic backdrop for the events as the story unfolds. This was made even better by the use of the map at the beginning of the book.

I enjoyed studying the map and working out where the different places were in relation to each other. This fast-paced gangster-fantasy adventure is full of magic, secrets, heists, ruthless gangs and hidden powers that keep you turning the pages. A true escapism experience.

However, I was not happy that it ended on such an extreme cliff-hanger with a lot of questions unanswered.

Anita Loughrey

www.anitaloughrey.com

Invisible in a Bright Light

Sally Gardner, pub. Zephyr Books

It is 1870. Celeste is caught in the gutter of time. She moves between the liminal experience of the sinister Cave of Dreamers, where she is required to play a deadly game, and real life as an orphan living secretly in the dome of an opera house. But is it real life? She knows herself to be Celeste, yet everyone insists she is Maria. The plot is difficult to describe but very easy to follow; I was drawn into the story right from the start. The writing is paced, lyrical and almost musical, particularly in the half-dream, half-reality crossovers. The characters spring to life immediately and were worth my investment as a reader. I simply could not put the book down.

This is not only the best children's story I have read this year but also one of the most beautifully produced. It's available as an audio and e-book, but the hardback is worth the investment for the feel and the look of it, from Helen Crawford-Wright's extraordinary cover to the velvety flick of the pages in the hand: a definite keeper.

Yvonne Coppard

Yvonne Coppard and Linda Newbery's *Writing Children's Fiction* is published by Bloomsbury.

Jackpot

Nic Stone, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books

Jackpot is a hard-hitting and thought-provoking story told mostly from the viewpoint of Rico Danger, a seventeen-year-old high school student, who is determined to track down the winner of a huge jackpot, after she discovers that the winning ticket has been sold in the place where she works, Gas 'n' Go.

Money – or rather, lack of it - is a huge deal to Rico as she and her family face the constant struggles that living on the breadline brings. Rico works long hours, goes to High School and helps look after her younger brother Jax, who she clearly adores. Her mother has made sure they are living in an area where her children can go to 'good schools', but living beyond their means makes the hardships they face even more difficult. Rico's mother is unable to pay the rent and bills without her daughter's earnings, so Rico has let go of her childhood and dreams in order to help support her family.

Rico's resolve to find the owner of the lottery ticket brings her something she seems to be sorely lacking: friendships, fun, and even a little romance. She enlists the help of one of her classmates: the handsome, rich Zan who is not at all what she was expecting for a privileged, rich boy. A really authentic feeling relationship forms between the two, which is brimming with quick-witted banter, uncertainty and honest revelations. As they cleverly chase clue after clue to track down the lottery ticket, will they be successful, or are they following a dead end?

Another relationship I enjoyed was the heartfelt, genuine friendship which develops between Rico and Jessica, who lives in her complex. Jessica is also living on the breadline, but she shows Rico that her poverty doesn't need to define her, and that being poor does not mean giving up on your dreams.

Rico is an incredibly likeable character who fights through her feelings of helplessness and desperation to show a resilience, grittiness and protectiveness towards her family that is admirable.

Yes, this is a story about chasing a missing lottery ticket, but I think it's about so much more than that. It is a story about chasing your dreams, despite the hardships you may face, and having the courage to take a chance on friendships and on yourself. I'm so glad Rico does just this!

Mary Rees

The Last Human

Lee Bacon, pub. Piccadilly Press

XR_ 935 is a robot who installs solar panels with other robots at a factory. The entire world is run by robots- there are no humans. Robots have destroyed all humans and the result is no war, crime or pollution. Everything runs smoothly and without fault.

XR and his co-workers make a startling discovery one morning- a human girl. All their understanding is that humans must be destroyed. A surprising turn of events leads the robots to abandon their jobs, families and town to help the girl find a new home. Her entire hidden community had fallen ill and her parents wanted her to find a new location on a map.

With powerful messages about conservation, leadership and friendship throughout, this book is a brilliant book to share. It has very short chapters and a dangerous journey to follow. With HunterBots, drones and a leader showing only damaging reports on humans, will XR and Emma be safe? Will they make it to the red dot marked on the map?

Emma, however, hasn't been entirely honest with her reasons for travelling and the robots are upset when they learn those reasons, but Emma has taught them about friendships and because they are an upgrade on their parents, XR and his friends are able to make different choices and decisions, leading to a wonderful ending to the journey.

I found this book easy to read, a fascinating change in perspective in how I viewed the world and an excellent study on empathy and our use of technology. A very enjoyable read and I can imagine children aged 8 and above loving this!

Erin Hamilton

The Liars

Jennifer Mathieu, pub. Hodder Children's Books

This is a YA novel from Jennifer Mathieu, whose bestselling book *Let's talk about Moxie* is being adapted for a Netflix film, directed by Amy Poehler.

The Liars follows Elena Finney, a white Hispanic 16-year-old girl who lives with her older brother Joaquin and her controlling, alcoholic mother, Caridad in Mariposa Island, Texas. The story is set in 1986 and Mathieu also tells some of Caridad's story from her life in 1950s and 60s Cuba as a protected and privileged teenage daughter of rich parents who are then caught up in Castro's revolution against President Batista's corrupt government.

This novel gives the reader an insight into the heart-breaking experience of the children who were spirited out of Cuba in the Pedro Pan movement in which 14,000 children left Cuba for the USA in the 1960s, separated from their parents in a glass fishbowl waiting area in the time before departure. Caridad become Carrie and is unable to truly adapt to the ugliness of her ordinary, new home after her protected start in life.

The reader comes to care for each character to a greater or lesser degree, as we understand their circumstances and unique pressures. Mathieu evokes the claustrophobia of their life together and the lies or fantasies that sustain each of them. There are no neat endings and Mathieu offers several narrative shocks in a story that will tug at the heartstrings.

Realistic, warm-hearted and emotive, this book offers young adult readers an unsentimental portrayal of the past and a compelling portrayal of complex family relationships.

Saira Archer

Look Both Ways

Jason Reynolds, illus. Selom Senu, pub. Knights Of

It's wonderful finding stories that trace the messy way that hurt and joy often co-exist - especially when these books emphasise the laughter that gets mixed up too along the way. *This Tale Told in Ten Blocks* accompanies kids on their daily walk home from school, one full of challenges and freedoms, and consists of ten individual sections.

While excellent character construction and absorbing dialogue keep you caught in each single segment as if it was its own story, Reynolds' decision to refer to these segments as a single tale creates additional feeling. He places them as tributaries, all part of a single river of story even though they

diverge into different pathways. Taken together, as a disparate but connected whole, these segments emphasise the sheer variety of difficult emotional moments that are shaping every day: the range of feeling encompassed in each segment speaks to how daily worry and amusement looks different for everyone.

There are small cross references and shared knowledge among the kids, all from the same school, but their segments differ significantly; bullying, cancer, loss, worry, trauma and panic all appear, iterating the intimidating potential for many sharp highs and lows amidst daily existence.

Laughter and relief have their turn in friendships and firm alliances, in conversations and solitude. The many friendships are warming to read, while individual ways of coping also emerge.

It is crucial that white readers do not predominantly experience texts with white protagonists, and this story may hopefully become one among many non-eurocentric tales to be read while growing up. For it is a book that you will very likely find stays with you, remembered throughout the unpredictable everyday.

Jemima Breeds

The M Word

Brian Conaghan, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Maggie Yates talks to her best friend, Moya, every day. She talks about her mum. Mum has lost her job, is alone and is very depressed. There are days when mum doesn't open the curtains and she cries alone and in secret. The crying is much more than sadness. She is very depressed and there are no easy fixes. Maggie is often rude to her mother and at times she regrets this. Maggie, too, has problems of her own.

This is a novel about grief and healing. It is not an easy read. At times it is a very difficult and uncomfortable read. It can also be a very stressful read. Despite this, it is also an addictive read and many teenage girls may well feel an attachment to the main character Maggie. Some difficult issues are tackled, including the problems of growing up as a teenager and the problems faced by a mother trying to cope alone. Depression and self harm feature throughout the story. This book will not be suitable for some young people, but others may take comfort from the way issues are tackled and will associate with the characters in the story.

It is a very realistic story, featuring some strong characters and will provoke some interesting thoughts and discussion amongst many young people and will probably appeal more to teenage girls.

Despite finding this at times a difficult and quite disturbing read, it was also difficult to put the book down. Once started, you will want to read it to the end, if only because you will be hoping for a positive outcome for both Maggie and her mum. When you read the book, you will discover the truth about Maggie's best friend, Moya, who features prominently in the story.

Gary Kenworthy

Night of the Party

Tracey Mathias, pub. Scholastic Children's Books

This clever, absorbing novel could hardly be more topical. We're in the near future, in an authoritarian post-Brexit England where the right-wing Party is in control, Scotland has left the Union, and anyone not British Born (BB) is at immediate risk of detainment and deportation. It's a criminal offence knowingly to conceal an illegal, ID checks and ugly slogans are everywhere, and anti-government protests lead to arrest. At the novel's opening, a general election is due at which a Coalition is expected to defeat the Party; but pollsters sometimes get things wrong, as we know only too well. The longed-for lifting of restrictions won't after all happen and instead the situation for illegals becomes worse, with routine house searches imminent.

Against this setting we're introduced to two viewpoint characters, Zara and Ash. They meet, apparently by chance, on an Underground train; but, as we soon find out, it's not chance at all, as Zara was at a fateful party a year ago where Ash's sister Sophie died in a drug-fuelled accident. The attraction between the two is immediate and powerful, but Ash doesn't find out till later that Zara is an illegal: Romanian-born, living in secret with her mother and her mother's lesbian lover. Zara has a good idea of who supplied the drugs to Sophie, but knows that coming forward will carry a risk, not only to herself but also to her mother and her partner. When she does go to the police, despite the danger, the situation becomes bleaker – and, towards the end, ever more page-turningly tense.

This brilliantly-crafted novel has already been shortlisted for awards, and it's not hard to see why. Tracey Mathias writes with complete assurance, and has created two equally engaging teenage narrators in Zara and Ash: serious, clever, fearful Zara, keen to study literature at University, and Ash, mourning the recent death of his sister and gradually suspecting friends and even his father of Party allegiance. Some readers will enjoy the novel mainly as a tale of star-crossed lovers, comparable with *Daz 4 Zoe* or *Noughts and Crosses*; others will be held by the thrills and twists of the plot. But it's the political setting, and how it affects ordinary lives, loyalties and aspirations, that makes this such an outstanding YA novel – at a time when young voters and soon-to-be-voters are spurred into activism by climate breakdown awareness and the Brexit fiasco. The various echoes of Brexit-wracked Britain and the exaggerating of polarities are so chillingly plausible that I hope we won't have moved closer to the rampant nationalism and racism shown here by the time this review is published.

Linda Newbery

Linda Newbery's *The Keys to Flambards* is published by David Fickling Books.

The Places I've Cried in Public

Holly Bourne, pub. Usborne

Amelie thought she was in love, maybe she was. It certainly felt like love. Her heart pounded and her pulse raced and she pictured a future that was all about Reese, and all about what he meant to her. But what did she mean to him? She thought he loved her too, but does real love hurt this bad? Does real love have so many tears in the memories? Amelie retraces the steps of her relationship with Reese to try to understand how she ended up here, and in doing so sees things with clarity for the first time.

As an adult reader, this book screams out with all the flags and warning signs of an abusive relationship, but these are things that come to use with age and Amelie has yet to learn them, as do most girls. This is an incredibly powerful book about the subtle shift from devotion to obsession, from passion to possessiveness, from adoration to abuse. It is a very clever book but more than that, it is also very readable and gripping. I so wanted to be able to reach into the pages and talk to Amelie and protect her, and I think we have all had friends that we want to rescue, and have maybe needed rescuing ourselves. My hope is that if all girls read books like this, maybe they'll have the tools to rescue themselves.

Dawn Finch

Footnote – Usborne have a link to some resources that might be useful if referring to this book in a school setting.

Scars Like Wings

Erin Stewart, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books

Warning: this book will make you cry. *Scars Like Wings* is an incredibly moving and powerful story about what it takes to stop being a victim and start being a survivor – not just for the person who has experienced tragedy but for all of us who every day come into contact with people who have suffered life-changing injuries. Ava is the only person to escape a horrific fire which killed her parents and her cousin and best friend Sara. The fire has left Ava disfigured and desperate. She has 60 percent burns, has undergone 19 gruelling surgeries and spent almost a year in hospital. For Ava, life is divided into the person she was before the fire and the person she is now and she is unable to see any way to reconcile the two. But Ava is persuaded by her medical team that it is time for her to return to 'normal' life and, encouraged by Sara's parents who have taken on Ava's guardianship, she reluctantly agrees to attend high school for a trial period.

Stewart expertly captures the cruelty of humanity in dealing with disfigurement and physical disability with a frightening rawness. The insults, the ignorance, the blatant horror etched on the faces of Ava's classmates as they stare at or avoid her is all too real. It is only when Ava meets Piper a fellow student and member of her burns support group that Ava gains the confidence to continue at school and to even return to singing, her passion from the time before. But their friendship, strong, feisty and defiant at the start, soon becomes tarnished as Ava discovers again that those we trust are not always trustworthy.

Scars Like Wings is a tough YA read because it deals with all of the insecurities faced by teenagers: trust, identity, friendship, failure, love, rejection, hope and disappointment. But it deals with all of those issues through a protagonist who has a claw for a hand, a hole for an ear, a compression suit under her uniform and a horribly disfigured face. Yet, what really shines through in this story is Ava's voice. She is an incredible narrator: real, honest and ultimately inspirational.

Anyone who liked *Wonder* but wished the protagonist was older will love *Scars Like Wings*. It is a moving book which encourages us all to value the importance of supporting others and recognising that we all have scars whether physical or mental but some scars run deeper than others. Perhaps we should follow the example of Ava's aunt and uncle who, despite their own scars at losing their beloved daughter in the fire that caused Ava's injuries, still offer their niece unconditional love, support and hope.

Warning: this book will make you cry. More than once!

Paulie Hurry

Sea Change

Sylvia Hehir, pub. Stone Cold Fox

A new writer with an unusual setting and subject for a YA novel is always newsworthy, and Sylvia Hehir has proved her promise by being nominated for several awards, and winning the Pitlochry Quaich in 2018. *Sea Change* is set in a remote Scottish fishing community, and portrays the lives of a handful of teenagers who engage not only with the difficulties of adolescence in a tight-knit rural community, but also the murder of an unknown teenager, found washed up on the shore.

The central character, sixteen-year-old Alex, is struggling to look after his widowed, grieving, and severely depressed mother. His goal is to leave school and earn the money needed to pay the mounting bills, but in the meantime he has various ways in which to try to keep the household from being cut off by utility providers. Unfortunately during the summer holiday he made some poor decisions, including getting involved with another teenager, Chuck, a stranger to the area, who enticed Alex to take ever-increasing risks. When Chuck disappears, and the body is washed up, faceless but wearing Alex's jumper, Alex and his friend Daniel make the obvious but erroneous

assumption that it is Chuck. Whose body it actually is emerges through a well-plotted, exciting and thoughtful narrative which examines the hopes and fears of a group of teenagers, each with their own confusing, often challenging family circumstances.

Hehir's characters are carefully created, each enduring that teenage angst which makes relationships with family and friends changeable, often unsettling, and frequently uncertain. Identity is at the core of the novel, with several of the characters uncertain of their family past, and, just as difficult, who and what they are now. Alex's relationship with Angus, sometimes antagonistic, sometimes friendly, emerges eventually from the turmoil which follows Daniel's disappearance, and allows Alex to come to terms with his own conflicted sexuality.

The strong sense of geographical remoteness serves to sharpen every uncertainty, creating an environment in which the characters often feel trapped in their fate, unable to escape. An excellent novel, engaging, gripping, powerfully written and emotionally compelling for teenage readers.

Bridget Carrington

Slay

Brittney Morris, pub. Hodder Children's Books

This is an incredibly powerful novel. It features Kiera, one of only four black students in her high school. At school, she stands out and faces questions about black history and culture from other students. At home, she is a gaming queen and she has created a masterpiece for black kings and queens. The game is called Slay and features vast worlds, character creation and battles to the death against other players.

Using Virtual Reality, Kiera steps into the ring as Emerald, with game co-creator Cicada. These girls rule the arenas, create the challenge cards and keep an eye on the battles happening each night. They know nothing real about each other. When the news hits that a Slay player is murdered over an in-game dispute, Slay comes under huge media exposure and Emerald is labelled as racist for creating a black player only game.

The storyline is moving, full of raw emotion and intense pressure on Keira, who keeps her gaming a complete secret from the outside world. When her game is threatened, Kiera must share her secrets and learn who she can trust. However, all who play the game are not who you think. Others are hiding secrets as well, and these threaten all that Kiera has built up.

It is a battle to the death on Slay, and a battle for Kiera and all that she holds close to her heart in real life.

I was completely gripped by this storyline. With technology and Virtual Reality taking the world by storm, this felt entirely plausible and I felt amazed by the crossover between the real world and Kiera's game world.

An incredible book and one I couldn't put down.

Erin Hamilton

Summerland

Lucy Adlington, pub. Hot Key Books

Brigitta Iguel is a fifteen year old refugee from Vienna to London in the year 1946. She is also a survivor of Auschwitz. Her mother has died and her father was taken by the Nazis, his fate unknown. Brigitta knows she must get to Summerland, an English country house that her mother has described. The Red Cross has brought Brigitta and other refugee children to England. But as soon as she can, she runs away. Adlington's novel tells the story of Brigitta's journey to Summerland Hall and the secrets she discovers when she arrives there.

There are of course a great many books about World War II but very few books examine the immediate aftermath of the war and the traumatic postwar period. The book also employs a striking technical effect. Brigitta's memories of the war are conveyed in the form of flashbacks which have great immediacy and impact on the reader. The issue lying at the heart of this book is that of identity. Brigitta's wartime experiences have shaped her anew. She is not the little girl she used to be. The son of the lady who owns Summerland Hall was an officer in the RAF. He was shot down. He has lost an arm and is facially scarred. His new identity must emerge from his daunting experience.

The book closes with a plot twist that very few readers will see approaching.

Rebecca Butler

White Eagles

Elizabeth Wein, pub. Barrington Stoke

A depth YA title that tells the story of brother and sister twins that are living in Poland, interested in the same things especially aviation, and both have the skills to fly planes. Kristina is conscripted to the Polish Air Force first, with her brother Leopold following the same fate when Polish planes started to take fire from the German Forces that had previously been gathering at the Polish border and concerning the country and now considered an immediate threat. Sadly Leopold is killed and Kristina witnesses his murder, using the grief to push her into escaping capture and flying her plane to safety.

Kristina finds a stowaway aboard her plane in the form of an eleven year old orphaned school boy who witnessed the murder of his parents by German troops. The journey that the pair set off on is fueled by grief and a desperation to escape the horror of war and sees them put themselves in serious danger, overcome the worst of the elements and achieve the impossible.

The story really is an emotional rollercoaster as it starts of so light and happy in its tone but quickly becomes a story of sadness, fear, and anger as war takes hold and affects the characters in such cold, savage and heart breaking ways which unite Kristina with Julian the orphan as they grieve for those they loved most. The entire story feels authentic as a war story and shines for it portraying a female hero - hugely unusual in war storylines.

Samantha Thomas

The Wrong Side of Kai

Estelle Maskame, pub. Ink Road Press

Vanessa doesn't do serious relationships. She's just not into all that serious stuff and prefers her relationships to be fun, and definitely no-strings attached. She's a breezy type who is enjoying her fling with Harrison. He's fun and seems to want the same things she does, but he gets too serious for her and so she decides to split up with him. That's when he reveals his true colours when he leaks a video he took of her – a very very private video. Now Vanessa is angry. Now she wants revenge, and what the hell is the deal with that new boy, Kai? Why does he want revenge?

The novel tumbles rapidly along through a world that will be incredibly familiar to YA readers. Maskame is very much the voice of youth and this book is a sharp and fresh read. The Wrong Side of Kai touches on some issues that could potentially be quite disturbing, but somehow Maskame makes it feel kind of...well... fun! That's no bad thing. Adult readers might find some of the content of this book a bit full-on, but I think that it's not for us.

It's for YA readers and sometimes us old people should just back off and let YA books speak to the generation they're written for.

Dawn Finch

Non-Fiction Book Reviews

5 Wild Shapes

Camilla Falsini, pub. Quarto Publishing

An innovative board book that introduces young children to a variety of shapes as well as an assortment of animals and their habitats. Each page has an inset shape with moveable inserts - sliding discs that allow little fingers to explore the shape in question – be it a square, triangle, circle, hexagon, wavy line or heart, and the fun starts on the front cover with a bee buzzing around inside a flower. Each shape matches the nature theme of the page so there's trees represented by a triangle and the sea represented by wavy lines.

The accompanying rhyming text tells a simple story about habitats and wildlife including trees, mountains, fields, bees and fish, and the pages are illustrated with nature-inspired images in a stylistic folk art style. The illustrations have a naïve quality and are in bright, bold colours making them attractive to young children.

An unusual way to familiarise children with basic shapes and perfect for developing hand-eye co-ordination skills, the robust and sturdy pages of this book are wipe-able and will take lots of wear and tear, making it ideal for the intended under three age group.

Barbara Band

Adventures On Earth

Simon Tyler, pub. Pavilion Books

Adventures on Earth is an invitation to celebrate the fascinating world of exploration. Examining the remote and wild places on our planet, Simon Tyler champions the pioneers whose passion, curiosity and bravery revealed the wonders of our world and the extraordinary animals that inhabit it. His bold and stylised illustrations take us through deserts and oceans, ice caps and mountains, jungles, caves and volcanoes, mapping out the age of exploration and commemorating the achievements of some truly exceptional individuals. There's the glaciologist Fritz Koerner, whose compelling studies of the sea ice have been used heavily in important climate-change discussions. Katia Krafft, the French volcanologist whose work documenting active volcanic eruptions had a great effect on public safety. Sadly in 1991, the year that one of her films prompted the evacuation of 60,000 people to Manila, thereby saving them from one of the largest eruptions in living memory, Katia herself was consumed by a sudden and deadly blast whilst recording the volcanic Mount Unzen in Japan. A sobering reminder of the risks these incredible navigators took in the pursuit of expanding our awareness of

this unique planet. But there is also an acknowledgment, that some of the early explorers were also responsible for tyrannical colonisation, and the emergence of slave trade and devastation to indigenous peoples around the world.

This is a book that takes you to the highest and deepest, hottest and coldest places on Earth, igniting the imagination and urging you to explore further, to question, and to appreciate the majesty of the most extreme places on this planet.

Matilde Sazio

Anatomicum

Curated by Katy Wiedmann and Jennifer Z Paxton, pub. Big Picture Press (in association with Wellcome Collection)

You will be forgiven for thinking that as the person writing this review works in a museum they may not want to spend their spare time visiting or reading about museums but *Anatomicum* is joining its partner books in the Welcome to the Museum Collection that is nicely growing on one of my bookcases and was also a very welcome and fascinating insight into the Museum of the Body ...

I am not sure about you but I have always been very curious about the human body - how does it work, why does it work, where does everything fit, what does it look like inside me, you, us? This large format, fully and highly illustrated book takes us into the human body, we get to see it from the inside out.

From the end page illustrations of the human body in both skeletal and fleshy form we are led into the workings of the machine that is the human body, a living machine that is constructed of hundreds of thousands of parts, all of which work together to make us human, to make us who we are. Through visits to six galleries we can learn more about the fascinating system which is our bodies and the way it not only works but fits together too. From skeleton to respiration, digestion to nervous system not forgetting immune and reproductive systems and of course the backbone of any museum - its library - it is all here for us and it will be here for a long time which is fortunate as it will take me some time to take it all in, read the facts, check facts against illustration and understand just how it is my body, your body, our bodies work.

Not for the squeamish, this book will show you how the heart beats, how your skin cells grow and where in your brain thoughts begin to take shape ... it does so with unique and vividly detailed illustration, classic in style yet groundbreaking in coverage. Not only is this volume a feast of anatomical knowledge it is a storehouse of fact waiting to be discovered, learnt from and revisited time and again. Here is a museum open all hours, one for the learned reader and the new visitor alike. A true masterpiece.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Atlas of Amazing Birds

Matt Sewell, pub. Pavilion Books

Avid ornithologist, writer and artist Matt Sewell personally selects amazing birds from across the world. His *Atlas of Amazing Birds* covers seven continents -- Europe, North and Central America, South America, Antarctica, Oceania, Asia and Africa -- and includes 140+ birds. There are between 18-30 birds for each continent, except Antarctica, which features only 3 birds. The number of birds in this selection therefore that you are likely to see in Britain is relatively few.

In particular Matt Sewell seems attracted to more colourful birds, such as the many Birds of Paradise found in Oceania, as well as more majestic birds, for example birds of prey like the Philippine eagle, one of the largest eagles in the world found in Asia. His watercolours are a visual delight, although not to scale. (The size of each bird is included in his description.) The art work beautifully captures each bird's form and plumage in a simplified style, but instantly recognisable. Most illustrations are free-floating with the text elegantly following the contours of the bird's form. There are also a number of illustrations that take up a whole page or more.

The entry for each bird uses its common name with a sub-heading of its Latin name in italics. The description usually includes the bird's plumage, distribution of the bird, habitat, migration patterns where relevant, sound or song and its behaviour, written in an accessible and engaging tone that tries to communicate the character of each bird. For example Matt Sewell describes the Northern Cardinal, the state bird for seven states in America, as having "punk rock attitude" and portrays the Masked Lapwing in Australasia as anti-social. In addition there is information on where to find each bird. The specified places do not always match the country names on the continental maps at the start of each section.

Atlas of Amazing Birds showcases some of the world's most impressive birds, delighting young ornithologists.

Simon Barrett

Children Who Changed The World: Incredible True Stories About Children's Rights

Marcia Williams, pub. Walker Books

Children Who Changed The World celebrates the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and is endorsed by Amnesty International. Marcia Williams is the author/illustrator of several retellings of classic stories such as Shakespeare and Dickens, and her unique style is immediately recognisable; humorous comic-strip illustrations with quirky borders in attractive bright colours.

This book contains thirteen true stories of child activists, individuals whose actions raised awareness of children's needs. Each unique story covers a double-page spread and highlights a particular right such as "every child's right to safety" demonstrated by the tale of Mayra Avellar Neves, born in Brazil, and "every child's right to good health" demonstrated by Kehkashan Basu, born in the UAE. There is a diverse range of children and the graphic style makes the book extremely accessible, particularly for middle grade readers.

This is an excellent book that can be used simply to explore children's rights and discover inspiring role models or it could be a starting point for further investigation both within and outside the curriculum. There is a list of the 54 articles of the Convention together with some additional names to explore and links to Children's Rights Organisations. It concludes with a short index.

Barbara Band

Darwin's Voyage of Discovery

Jake Williams, pub. Pavilion Books

Published to celebrate 160 years since *On The Origin of Species* (Charles Darwin's revolutionary work), this illustrated tribute by Jake Williams is a terrific celebration of Darwin's own evolution from boy to explorer to scientist through the voyage that inspired almost all modern-day knowledge of the natural world, and transformed the course of science.

That voyage began in December 1831 onboard HMS Beagle, following an introduction by his mentor at Cambridge, botany professor John Stevens Henslow. Twenty-two year old Charles Darwin, who had been on course to become a clergyman, set sail from Plymouth as the ship's naturalist, and would not see England again for almost five years. His journey covered 65,000 kilometres as the crew surveyed coastline and made maps. It took him to Cape Verde, Brazil to the Galapagos, Tahiti to Australia, with every step realised in Jake's vibrant illustrations. HMS Beagle is dissected to reveal the cramped conditions the crew navigated during their months at sea; a space packed with all the essentials a traveller could need for an around-the-world journey, from food halls to mess rooms and coal storage. We learn that the chart room, where the crew came together to examine maps and plot the course of the ship, was also the space where Darwin would sleep, hooking a hammock above the chart table each evening. There's a great two-page spread of Darwin's kit list. It's a moment I can envisage a child carefully poring over as they anticipate the explorations to come: the pistol to stay

safe, the microscope for studying specimens, the clinometer a special compass that measures the angle of a mountain slope.

Alas, poor Darwin we discover, suffered from seasickness the moment he left England, until his return home five years later. But his misery was tempered by breathtaking landscapes and extraordinary wildlife. He encountered the bones of the extinct giant sloths (previously unknown to science), which when living over 10,000 years ago would have been the size of a car. He witnessed an astonishing battle between a tarantula and a hawk wasp. Shimmering hummingbirds, platypus, fireflies and much more, are sumptuously detailed in this engaging book that is packed with a wealth of facts.

When Darwin eventually arrived back home in England, he spent his time examining his collections of birds, reptiles and plant specimens, and after twenty years he published his theory on natural selection, challenging the common belief at the time, that God made the Earth and its animals. As an old man, Darwin described his voyage on HMS Beagle, as the most important event in his life. Jake Williams perfectly captures the adventure and the marvel, in this ambitious and stylish book. It is an inspirational study of a passion for science and nature for any child to savour.

Matilde Sazio

The Explanatorium of Science

Robert Winston, pub. Dorling Kindersley

Robert Winston has written many successful science books for children and this one is no exception. It is a large book full of incredible photos, experiments and information explained in a child friendly way. “*The Explanatorium of Science* helps us all to see science in action”. Robert Winston has set out his purpose clearly and we can then proceed to choosing from the table of contents, which area of science we are keen to see for ourselves.

From Matter to Forces and from Energy to Earth, there is plenty to explore in this book. I was drawn to the Earth section as it is so relevant in all the discussions of climate change and protecting our world. Robert Winston looks at the basics of the Earth, rocks and fossils and how they are formed. It also looks at how seasons work. Such basic scientific topics but they are explained brilliantly and this book would make a great gift for any budding scientists.

The language keeps a balance between being child friendly as well as ensuring proper scientific language is included. Under each area are a set of questions asking How... How seasons work, how osmosis works, how glass works. I was fascinated by the entire book, spending ages looking through the book and studying.

This giant tome would be a perfect addition to any home or classroom. Budding scientists will love the facts, language and proof of how things work, and amateur scientists will value the expertise from Robert Winston. What a fantastic book!

Erin Hamilton

Explorers

Nellie Huang and Jessamy Hawke, pub. Dorling Kindersley

Explorers presents 50+ daring adventurers who have traversed across seas, ice and land as well as flown across air and space. The book begins with Pytheas, an ancient Greek who sailed around North Europe in the 4th century BCE and possibly reached Iceland, and continues to the present with the stories of 11 explorers alive today.

The book includes many famous individuals, often national heroes. Ferdinand Magellan who led the first voyage to circumnavigate the globe: he died from a poisoned arrow. Amundsen and Scott's famous race to be the first to the South Pole. Scientists, such as Alexander von Humbolt and Charles Darwin. Archaeologists, for example, Howard Carter and the tomb of Tutankhamun. Astronauts, including Yuri Gagarin, the first person in space. All men. All white. *Explorers* however rectifies past injustices. Entries include indigenous explorers. Sacagawea, a young Native American woman, translator and guide for Lewis and Clark is given equal status in the success of exploring the western United States. Edmund Hillary, New Zealand mountaineer, and Tenzing Norgay, Nepali-Indian mountaineer, share the achievement of the first to conquer Everest. Moreover there are many women included in the book. One of the most inspirational stories is that of Barbara Hillary, who has also written the foreword. At the age of 75, having survived cancer twice, she reached the North Pole, the first African-American woman. The first African-American man of course was Matthew Henson. Finally Karen Darke, despite being paralysed from the chest down, has scaled El Capitan in the USA, hand-cycled through the Himalayas and crossed Greenland.

Neither does the book ignore the 'dark-side' of exploration and there is a special feature chapter on this topic. This includes the spreading of diseases that the indigenous population could not resist. Colonization, settling in a new land and taking it over. Slavery, particularly shipping of African people to the Americas to work on plantations. The military expedition resulting in terrible acts of violence. Also extinction of animals, such as the dodo. It is also mentioned in other chapters. Villas-Bôas brothers explored central Brazil and worked to protect the rainforest and the tribes within. In addition there is a strong environmental message in the stories of explorers such as Sylvia Earle. Her deep sea explorations have shown the impact of pollution and she has launched Mission Blue to protest marine areas.

Explorers is comprehensive, detailed and visually appealing with its mix of photographs and illustrations, supporting the text. Well done Nellie Huang, Jessamy Hawke and all at Dorling Kindersley for another high quality reference book.

Simon Barrett

Forgotten Fairy Tales of Brave and Brilliant Girls

Foreword by Kate Pankhurst, pub. Usborne

There are eight forgotten fairy tales in this collection and each is a tale of magical powers - as Kate Pankhurst writes in her foreword - all stories have magical powers! Fairy tales are stories that have been told for thousands of years, be this in fields of flowers on bright sunny days whilst enjoying a picnic or a walk in the woods, on dark wintery evenings around a warming fire or for bedtime dreams, they have been told, remembered and passed on from one generation to another. In the process some have stayed in the popular imagination, others slipped out and were nearly lost - until now that is. Having collected and gathered up the stories they came to be very much a reflection of their world - a world where we wanted magical tales of princess waiting to be rescued and so those tales which did not tell these stories became gradually sidelined. Now there are eight stories that you, the reader, along with all of us, have the chance to bring back to life - read them, tell them, share them.

In this collection we meet Bessie, a princess who would much rather be quite ordinary, be working in the stables, chatting to the servants, outside getting muddy and messy - you know the type! Bessie is the *Daring Princess*. Alongside her meet a bored princess in her *The Sleeping Prince* story. Clever Molly sets out to defeat a giant and rescue a kingdom whilst the *Nettle Princess* is both brave and strong. With this collection of stories here is an opportunity to see princesses as you may never have imagined and may never have before. Be inspired by their stories to share, to do something different, to feel empowered - and not just as a girl or a boy but as a reader too. These tales are easy to read for readers newly independent, those looking to dip into some shorter stories or even those wishing to share the joy of reading with friends and siblings. With charming and expressive full colour illustration this is the perfect family bedtime book for the bookcase, quick read story book for school and all-round greatly readable collection of stories.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

The History of Prehistory

Mick Manning and Brita Granström, pub. Otter-Barry Books

The History of Prehistory takes the reader on a 4 billion year journey from the very beginning of the Earth until the beginning of recorded history by the first human authors -- Bronze Age Sumerians -- and the first ever named human author: En-hedu-anna.

The reader joins two children as each double spread introduces a different eon or period in the Earth's prehistory. Superbly illustrated by the authors-artists, the pictures capture the drama of the environment, plants and creatures of this early Earth. There are also a number of different texts, including the main description of the period, dialogue by the two children and other inserts with more detailed information. Moreover, the text is engaging, drawing in the reader to look, imagine and wonder. Fish fingers is certainly redefined in this book to mean fish with fingers! The technical language is usually italicized and some important information is emphasized in bold. Along with the illustrations therefore, the book is a visual delight.

The technical language however does not take away from the enjoyment of the book as it is often supplementary to the narrative. For example the title of each double spread is inspired by key features of the period -- Terrifying Pterosaurs or Life in the Treetops -- and the technical names used as a sub-header: Jurassic period or Late Paleocene period. This should encourage readers to find out more independently and accessing the correct information using this terminology. There is also further information in the glossary, although it is not extensive.

Finally there is an excellent timeline game at the back of the book, to help children remember the key facts of 4 billion years of prehistory. It is a brilliant illustrated distillation of each historical eon on one page!

The Prehistory of History is not a book: it is an adventure.

Simon Barrett

How Many Points For A Panda?

Hilda Offen, pub. Troika Books

It is the spooky season and the monsters, fairies, mermaids, dinosaurs and other interesting creatures have invited me to begin an adventure, to find a secret map and explore a world, only I can. This winter I have this adorable poetry collection written and illustrated by Hilda Offen called *How Many Points for a Panda?*

Lo and behold! The poems begin with monsters and magic and Marie the Monster appears just to trifle with her brother before she turns back into her human form! Then we step into the magical glittery shoes of Libby Lou and reach the wild beast Buzzaboo! But what does he do? Well, if you say 'Boo!' to a wild Buzzaboo, he'd throw custard at you! From land monsters, we move to the sea with its

gigantic whales and all engulfing sea mists and up we go into the air high with Icarus the Proud to dive into the ocean to Mermaids and sea monsters-

"The water's clear, the water's cool;
I dive into the glassy pool...
Where jewel-encrusted monsters haunt
The coral caves and mermaids flaunt
Their rainbow tails..."

The book contains poems on curious creations of our weird and artsy thoughts, interjecting reality. The world of imagination which exists with our mundane plane creates magical universes and that's what the poet emphasises-

"No-one knows what I see
Through my aunt's window-pane;
I can shatter the world -
Then build it up all again."

This wonderful book includes stories from myths, folk tales, fairy tales and modern lives. Divided into sections titled Monsters and Magic; Secrets and Shadows; Talking and Squawking and Here There and Everywhere; the rhymes are written in a language easy to grasp with themes of social etiquettes, family life, imagination, facing bullies, and the creation of a hyggelig safe space.

Here, kids get to learn the name of clouds, the beauty of a midsummer day, history, scrying, visiting old castles and discovering so much that nature can offer and the mind can experience and that's why the little boy doesn't simply look beyond his glass window, but affirms his magic -

"And no-one suspects
The power of my glance.
It's magic! I'm making
The Church Steeple dance."

The illustrations and words complement each other and help in invoking the unimaginable and fantastical. One can gift it to little ones to encourage imagination and creativity or to just read, to revel in a world conjured by the creative creatures in it.

Ishika Tiwari

Into the Deep: An Exploration of Our Oceans

Dr Wolfgang Dreyer and Annika Siems, pub. Prestel

It's hard to describe this magical superlative book. As the title indicates, it is an exploration of the oceans with each chapter taking us deeper and deeper into a mysterious and unknown world where we discover what lives within each watery layer. It's a large format (30cm by 30cm) which lends itself well to the huge illustrations that span across the pages. These are both fascinating and terrifying – fish with razor-sharp teeth and grasping tentacles that can easily crush a person - and are accompanied by minimal text allowing them to take centre stage.

The images are oil paintings, created on a large canvas and then photographed. The text is informative giving the reader interesting facts about each level and the creatures within it; did you know that at 4 metres the colour red is no longer visible? And that the Japanese spider crab has a leg span of 18 feet? The awe-inspiring paintings are interspersed with pages that contain detailed drawings showing the working of various parts of fish anatomies and there is a short index.

This book has huge appeal – not only for budding oceanographers but also as a book to showcase the wonders and marvels of our world.

Barbara Band

Inventor Lab

Jack Challoner, pub. Dorling Kindersley

Subtitled *Awesome Builds for Smart Makers*, this book offers just that, 18 step-by-step projects for children to construct. These include an automatic night light, a remote-controlled snake and matchbox microphone. Writing in the foreword, engineer and inventor Dr Lucy Rogers, hopes the book will be a springboard for young makers, inspiring them to adapt, combine and design their own projects, using the techniques learned by following the instructions here.

These instructions are comprehensive and clearly laid out, each step accompanied by photographs and diagrams. A section on staying safe, following manufacturer's guidelines, and essential tools opens the book. This is followed by descriptions of components, skills and techniques needed and constructing electric circuits. Guidance as to the time it takes, level of difficulty and any issues to be aware of, is given at the beginning of each project, so that children can find something at the appropriate level, whether they are beginners or have more experience.

This book would make a fabulous gift for a child keen to learn about making and inventing and to have a go themselves.

Jayne Gould

Ladybird Tales of Superheroes

pub. Ladybird Books

When we first received this book to review my kids were so excited to read about the idea of reading Superheroes that they couldn't wait to open the book. The front cover was so colourful and bright that it really made them excited about starting reading straight away.

My 10 year old daughter decided she would like to read the book to the rest of us and we soon found that it was full of amazing stories about different types of superheroes from different years. Each of the stories was so intriguing and full of character that we couldn't put the book down after we had started. We just found ourselves captivated and wanting to learn more. With each page, the combination of pictures and artwork had us excited to stop and look, discuss too, and then move on to the next. The stories accompanying each of the superheroes and their illustrations were great to read and ideal in length so that the children didn't get bored of them.

I would recommend this book for all age groups but be warned, if you are using it for bedtime reading it is exciting and hard to put down however with its range of stories it is a great choice as they were different each time with new heroes in each section.

Growing up with the Ladybird books as a child was always a lot of fun because they were all different and easy to read, now my children and yours can do the same. Definitely a book I would recommend for home and school.

Melissa Blackburn

The Lost Fairy Tales

Retold by Isabel Otter, illus. Ana Sender, pub. Caterpillar Books

A book full of heroines, none of whom needs to be rescued - maybe like me you are now wondering if this is actually a possibility. I can assure you that, having read this for myself, that is it. In this book at least. *The Lost Fairy Tales* has no damsels in distress nor any prissy princesses! In this book you will find instead twenty tales of forgotten fairy tales that have been hiding in the many and varied cultures of the world just waiting for the right moment to be found. And wonderfully none of them are more than a few pages long - now I don't say that lightly - being a lover of books and reading I love nothing more than the challenge of lots of words and good doorstopper of a book but I know that is not for everyone and sometimes a good story is quickly told. So, here there are twenty good stories, quickly told, each featuring a heroine who has the potential to inspire, show wit, cunning and bravery - what will you, the reader, make of them all and will you emulate them I wonder and if you have the time to share I would love to know!

If you are not sure where to start with this book - for it is one book which can be dipped into - then take a look at the story map you will find at the front of the book, see where in the world each of the stories has come from and consider what type of story may have come from the associated culture. Once you have decided which story to read navigate to it using the list on the contents page and get set to enjoy. Perhaps you will find yourself reading about *Aurora and the Giants*, a story which does not hold back on more challenging language for the reader to engage with, is incredible, harsh in places and yet also uplifting and fun. The wandering Russian harpist may catch your imagination with its traditional and, I believe typical and traditional style of illustration. If you do dip in rather than read from cover to cover the varying background colours of the pages, a different one for each story, may help you to mentally bookmark where you were last and what you have already seen. Furthermore whilst all the illustrations are sympathetically in keeping with the background page colours they reflect the richness of each story and as such are packed with appropriate and suitable colour and imagery.

There are many memorable aspects to this book, not least the illustration. The stories sit well together creating a seamless new world to be opened, appreciated, understood and enjoyed.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

National Trust: Step Inside Homes Through History

Goldie Hawk, illus. Sarah Gibb, pub. Nosy Crow & The National Trust

This wonderful National Trust/Nosy Crow publication quite literally gives its readers the opportunity to take a peek at the different homes and living styles of people throughout history. From the books' front cover onwards homes through history are opened, revealed.

Beginning with visual glimpses of a typical home from the late middle ages, this book shows us how the people of that time lived and then traces the developments of homes through the following years of history up to the present day. Whilst the text on every page is informative it is the illustrations that truly make the book. Through these the reader is given a very real sense of looking back. See the clothes that were worn, understand the general feel of the landscape and peer through the cut-out windows into the homes.

It is not a book which challenges the preconceptions of architecture you might have, say in thinking about Tudor styling, it cements those stylised ideas of how we used to live with personal and warm drawings of the past. The different time periods are carefully considered.

Another particular strength of the book is the layering, the distinction between the outside and the inside of the home which is done particularly well for the Georgian period.

This book would suit someone who may already have an idea of how homes in the past looked but has a keen eye for seeing what the physical changes have been over a five hundred year period. It is also of interest to budding social and architectural historians as well as the naturally nosy and curious!

Melissa Blackburn

Nine Worlds in Nine Nights. A Journey Through Imaginary Lands

Hiawyn Oran, illus. David Wyatt, pub. Walker Studio

Welcome to an astonishing collection of writing, drawing, painting and examples of souvenirs, collected together during the travels of Professor Dawn Gable (prize-winning theoretical physicist) and showing that wherever your mind takes you you need to be sure that you, and it, are open to all possibilities ... bear in mind, before we start, that all the items collected together in this volume are the result of travels in a phantom machine which was powered by a beastly apparition and a book that very much had a mind of its own ...

Well, in the hope that this introduction has helped you prepare yourself for what I am about to describe and that which one day perhaps you too will have the opportunity to see not only the machine the professor used for her travels - as illustrated on the inside of the front cover - but also the magnificent illustrations, facts, diary entries and more that lie within this stunning book.

The pictures are annotated with snippets from diary entries and letters, type-written and each explaining what the professor was doing, who and what she met, her experiences and some of her thought processes too! I am not sure if you, the reader will agree, but I feel sure that if I was led to a machine that could transform itself into multiple forms I am not sure I would want to be travelling in it! The professor was not put off however and we soon find out about each of the nine worlds she had the opportunity to experience - Kor has an abandoned temple, ancient city and extinct volcano with simply stunning bird and other wildlife depicted too no part of this, or any of the other worlds, is left out. Science fiction techs will love Mekanopolis - city of machines with its Museum of Humans and the classics of Camelot and Atlantis will be loved by all. These are just a sample of the nine worlds waiting to be experienced and just a flavour of this breathtaking book, this sumptuous work of intrepid imagination.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

North America

Sarah Albee, illus. William Exley, pub. What on Earth Books

North America is a fold-out graphic history and geography of the North American continent. Read as a traditional book or showcased on a wall, *North America* presents the natural and human history of the world's third largest continent.

North America in this format presents a mind-boggling amount of information in a creative, imaginative way that often challenges our perceptions of this part of the world. The book begins circa 10,000 BCE with the earliest hunter and gather cultures, continuing with the settled agricultural communities and nations of North America, the great builders, such as the Aztecs and their great capital of Tenochtitlàn and only then from 1492 CE, the European invasions. In addition, *North America* shows the flows of people throughout the continent's history, including the indigenous people, European colonizers and forced migration of slaves from Africa. Sadly there are wars and disasters, but there are also inventions, great architecture and monuments, industry and social progression and radicals.

Overall the illustrations unify the book. Using warm pastel shades to trace the history of the southern part of the continent and cooler colours for the colder north makes it easier to follow some of the changes over time. Visually it also conveys continuations in history - notably styles of architecture - as well as some of the discontinuations in history: the appearance of Europeans and the re-introduction of the horse, the railway and motor car. Although there is a map of the political division of the continent today, the illustrations also demonstrate the historical connections between these countries.

North America is eight feet of 15,000 years of history worth exploring.

Simon Barrett

Refugees

Brian Bilston, illus. José Sanabria, pub. Palazzo

A cleverly crafted book that highlights prejudices and bigotry. The poem can be read both forwards and backwards to show two opposing views about refugees. The provides a brilliant opportunity for discussion and a way to talk about fear and hate and the need for compassion, understanding and empathy. I particularly like the way the poem is laid out on the left of the spread when read forward and on the right side when it is re-written backwards in the second half of the book.

The colours used for the illustrations also help to convey the different moods and feelings, with dark sad-faced images to show the fear and mistrust and brighter, colourful images with happy smiling faces to demonstrate people from different races and cultures are all the same all around the world, doing the same jobs, same activities and everyday routines. An excellent book to promote debate.

The book would be ideal for PSHE classes not only at KS1 or KS2 but also KS3 and KS4 as the opposing views are relevant for all ages. It would also be interesting to have children craft their own similar poems to show opposing views on this and other subjects, such as climate change, conservation and Brexit.

Anita Loughrey

www.anitaloughrey.com

Shakespeare for Every Day of the Year

Allie Esiri, pub. Macmillan Children's Book

If there's one playwright and poet everyone knows of and admires, it's Shakespeare. He is old and new and everything in between. This winter I have Allie Esiri's *Shakespeare for Every Day of the Year* and I have grown wiser, full of new facts, and have been thoroughly entertained by this enriching compilation.

As we proceed with each day of the year, we meet all those beloved, despised, ambivalent and wholesome characters from Shakespeare's plays: King Lear, Hamlet, Antony, Othello, Jacques, Iago; along with the vivacious and multidimensional female characters like Rosalind, Cleopatra, Portia, Desdemona amongst many others. We experience the myriad emotions forcefully rendered by them and we realise how meaningful they are even today.

The editor has carefully chosen passages where Shakespeare reigns supreme in his understanding of politics, history, social structures, love, revenge, tragedy and comedy as experienced by a flawed humanity, with notable lines like this much quoted and revised one by Hamlet-

"To be, or not to be – that is the question;
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them."

Each page of the book has events from real life or tales related to Shakespeare or his works, matching the date on which they occurred. It contains an all encompassing vision of his words and achievements listed with interesting facts such as this one related to Henry V-

"The Second World War broke out on 3 September 1939, during the course of which Prime Minister Winston Churchill invited the legendary actor Laurence Olivier to film a version of Henry V. Financed by the government, it was a critical and commercial success and an ingenious piece of

wartime propaganda. A play full of rousing rhetoric and patriotic gumption, Shakespeare's original 1599 production would have served a similar purpose, drumming up a sense of national pride."

The effort of the editor is laudable as the brilliant curation of emotions and facts in this anthology brings about nostalgia and admiration. This gorgeous book is embroidered within and without to be kept as a keepsake or to be gifted. To receive and give the comfort woven in these evergreen expressions of Shakespeare, is a much recommended gesture.

Erin Hamilton

Together

Isabel Otter and Clover Robin, pub. Caterpillar Books

A flock of cranes take off on a vast migration, covering thousands of miles. As they fly, they pass over land and sea until they reach their winter feeding grounds. Travelling across continents, a variety of landscapes, including mountains, grasslands and savannah, open up below them. On each double page opening, a haiku describes animals working in partnership to protect, hunt and keep clean. Accompanied by a few lines of fascinating facts, the reader will learn, for example, that the wolf pack has strong social bonds, remora fish gain a free lift whilst keeping sharks free of parasites and a shared love of honey benefits both badger and bird. The book is illustrated with intricate, textured and layered paper collages, a technique which the artist Clover Robin, uses to great effect. The natural, subtle, tones give life to the landscapes whilst high above cut-outs in the shape of clouds, show the progress of the cranes. A delightful book to share and talk about with young children.

Jayne Gould

Walk This Underground World

Kate Baker and Sam Brewster, pub. Big Picture Press

Winter is here, and animals big and small have stocked up for a cozy life underground. But, do only animals live underground? Certainly not, we humans are much acquainted with the subterranean life as well! This winter I have traversed the below surface world of animals and human beings in this brightly coloured picture book, titled *Walk This Underground World* by Kate Baker and Sam Brewster.

In this, we go on a visual journey to the underground world of contemporary Montreal, London, Egypt, Poland, Australia and Tokyo with its hyggelig cafés, bakeries, homes, caves and tube station juxtaposed to the warm weathered world of tunnels dug by ferrets and mole rats. The author has shared interesting and fun facts about unique habits of underground dwellers as well-

"Long lines of worker ants march into the forest to forage. They cut down flowers, twigs and leaves, then bring them back to the nest. Smaller ants sometimes hitch a ride on top of a leaf and help fight off attackers."

The beautiful graphics of this flap book takes one on a back and forth time travel to show how Ancient Egyptians stored artifacts and mummies, how dinosaurs used to roam the crust of the earth, which with time is submerged and now unearths beautiful and interesting fossils of creatures big and small; and what a movement into the opal mines reveals!

This book shall definitely bring joy to the little explorers, curious about their vicinity. This adventurous trip shall help them visualise the exciting lives and treasures occupying subterranean regions!

Ishika Tiwari

Who Am I?

Rachel Clare, photography Tim Flach, pub. Abrams Books for Young Readers

Tim Flach is an award-winning photographer well-known for his portraits of animals and in *Who Am I?* he uses his skills to introduce young readers to ten at-risk species. The book consists of a series of stunning photographs hidden behind pages with peek-through windows. Some of these are circular cut-outs; others are filled-in holes that show parts of the animal's features.

Each image is accompanied by a short riddle giving clues as to the animal's identity, such as: "I have the best of both worlds – on the land and in the water. Some people say I'm a walking fish." (Answer – an axolotl). Each riveting shot is close-up and sharp against a black background bringing you eye-to-eye with a diverse range of animals. There is further information about each of them at the back of the book including "what makes me so special?" and "why are we endangered?" as well as some suggestions for how you can help such as using less energy and supporting neighbourhood wildlife.

For those who would like to see more of Flach's photography, these images have been taken from his adult book "Endangered"; he can also be followed on Instagram @timflachphotography.

Barbara Band

Wild Girls. How to have Incredible Outdoor Adventures

Helen Skelton, illus. Liz Kay, pub. Walker Books

Helen Skelton is probably more well-known as a Blue Peter and Countryfile presenter. However, she has undertaken several physically challenging adventures and this is a record of them. There are six chapters each dealing with a different habitat and each following the same format: firstly describing Helen's adventure including her training and preparation; kit lists; a day-by-day diary of the event; and the best and worst bits. There follows both wild adventures and extremely wild adventures to try! For example, chapter 1 covers adventures in the snow. Helen used a bike as part of an expedition to the South Pole; the wild adventures include ice-skating and snowboarding, and the extreme adventures include ice climbing and sleeping in a snow hole. Finally, there is a wall of fame that details other female adventurers who have undertaken similar expeditions.

Other chapters cover adventures on the sand where Helen did 3 marathons across a desert in 24 hours; adventures on the water where she kayaked solo down the Amazon; adventures in the mountains where she climbed Ben Nevis; adventures in the countryside that involved a Royal Marines Command speed march; and adventures in the city which saw her walking across a 150m high wire strung between the Battersea Power station towers!

The book is written in the form of a travel journal with the text broken up by photos, maps, sketches and additional information. Pages have coloured blocks with sections looking like they have been taped or stapled in. This is an inspirational and fascinating book that would appeal to everyone whether they are armchair adventurers or want to plan something themselves. It is more suitable for older children as it warns (several times) that adult supervision is needed for the adventures.

Barbara Band

WildLives. 50 Extraordinary Animals that made History

Ben Lerwin, illus. Sarah Walsh, pub. Nosy Crow

Do you know the story of Binti Jua? Well I'll tell you, the place is Brookfield Zoo in Chicago 1996 and a three year old boy and his family are visiting the zoo when suddenly the boy slips and falls into the gorilla cage. Now I know what you are thinking, but you are wrong, Binti Jua scares the other gorillas away, then she gently picks the unconscious boy and takes him to the keeper's entrance. Amazing wasn't she. I think so. Thousands of people came from around the world to visit Binti Jua. She became a national hero. This story is one of 50 brilliant true stories about extraordinary animals. Another story is about Trakr – the dog who found the last survivor of 9/11. These are just two examples of the animals featured in this book.

This is a book of brave rescuers, amazing adventurers brilliant discoveries, problem solvers and heroes. But the difference is that they are all animals.

This book is fantastic and anybody will be lucky to have this book on their book shelf. The writing is good and a lot of research has been done to bring the content together. The illustrations are beautifully drawn and very detailed, the book contains real life pictures, artists pictures, diagrams and maps. My children loved looking at the pictures and reading about true animal stories. This is a beautiful book and one I'll keep for a long time.

Helen Byles

The Wonders of Nature

Ben Hoare, illus. Angela Rizza and Daniel Long, pub. Dorling Kindersley

I like encyclopaedias, but must confess are always a few pages that tend to remain relatively untouched, as you move to the A-listers: is there a picture of a T-rex -preferably killing something? Is there a really big picture of a shark – preferably killing something? Are there some dramatic pictures of eagles – preferably killing something?

The Wonders of Nature takes the populist encyclopaedia browser and pushes them (or, er, me) into uncharted territory. Grouped loosely and accessibly into 'Rocks', 'Microscopic life', 'Plants' and 'Animals' each entry has been selected for its 'wondrous' qualities that can divert the attention of even the most hardened T-Rex thrill seeker. Hoare reacquaints us to some of the headliners (bears, eagles, tarantulas) but goes far beyond this to celebrate the quieter wonders of nature: whale sharks, wombats, amber, water bears and desert stones.

He has been guided simply by what is interesting and quirky in nature, as opposed to any particular scientific doctrine, and the resulting compilation is whimsical, fascinating and fun. Each 'wonder' is simply presented on a double page spread, with stunning illustration and photography and one or two paragraphs of explanation. The paragraphs bear little resemblance to a traditional instructional tone, but instead are framed more like mini conversations with a curious reader. 'Greeny-blue or bluey-green? It's hard to decide, because turquoise is a mixture of both colours.' Or: 'Is that a bird? Or an umbrella? You can see why people call the black heron the 'umbrella bird!'

For me, this book taps into how we absorb information: in bite-sized chunks, with anecdote and personality. It may not be comprehensive, but it sparks curiosity and sticks in your mind. It's also worth taking a moment to praise the 'visual' contents and index pages, where you can look for things via their image as opposed to their name. A tiny adjustment, but a totally different form of engagement as a result.

You could read this book with a child; you could read it before bed; you could keep it by the loo; you could take it the pub (possibly). It is beautiful to look at; delightful and wonderful in every sense to read. A pleasure!

Laura Myatt

Climate matters: Book notes

Armadillo reviewer Amy Grandvoinet introduces, in this feature, some new literature on climate matters for young people to read this winter ...

I write this short piece a few days following Friday 29th November 2019, a day tagged – across the UK – with two personas: ‘Black Friday’ and one of numerous ‘Fridays for Future’. Both are terms that I almost feel require no explanation, ubiquitous as references to and understandings of today. But just in case any reader has somehow managed to avoid coming into contact with such consumption-related-holidays that have found their addition to our yearly calendars ... Black Friday refers to the Friday that follows the fourth Thursday (or Thanksgiving) in November whereby human beings have the chance to buy up products at so-called cut-prices to mark the start of the run up to Christmas. ‘Fridays for Future’ refers to the systematic striking of school students on various Fridays in calling for action on climate justice that have consistently mobilised since Greta Thunberg’s initial demonstration outside the Swedish government in late August 2018. The relationship between these two Friday-personas is no doubt far more complex than this short piece on recommendations of climate-change-related books for young people can stretch to, but it could be safe to say that their simultaneous existence somewhat underlines the tensions between post-industrial global capitalism and the present/future wellbeing of our shared planet.



It is my opinion, as well as many others’, that evolving environmental collapse is one of the most pressing, all-encompassing, and complex challenges we are now facing collectively world-wide. If the science is there both to prove historic, current and impending devastations originating primarily with 19th century developments in Western industry, and also there to provide suggestions for solutions in aiming to, as far as possible, lessen the continuation of runaway destruction and restore/build sustainability, why aren’t we any further yet? The picture is, regrettably, grim (I’ll not go into facts and figures here; please find links to further resources at the end of this brief feature), but to avoid engaging with this vast problem on any level can feel even grimmer. If we can accept the notion that it is something we – dare I say it – should be engaging with indeed, how to do so can present itself as an overwhelming and sometimes debilitating puzzle, particularly considering the central need to adequately nurture and support young people with long lives ahead of them amidst such a gravely troubling scenario.

The following book notes are here in hope to assist that objective, outlining reading for young people that might help in structuring further thought on how to go about interacting

with the environmental issues we face at present. At this dark and reflective point in the year, accessing such literature, whether via public library, in school, private purchase and sharing with others, or even perhaps as festive gifts, could help illuminate tools in building for greater hope, love, and peace on Earth entering 2020.

Valentina Camerini, **Greta's Story: The Schoolgirl Who Went on Strike to Save the Planet**, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books

Greta Thunberg's visibility is no doubt vivid, and her values surely well-known, but retracing details of how this one highly influential individual came to stand where she now stands, and from what wider contexts her campaign arose, can be tricky to place.

Valentina Camerini's unofficial biography of Thunberg, first written in Italian and translated here by Moreno Giovannoni into English, elucidates the story of this remarkable and widely-reported-on young person with both intimacy and respect, shading in important personal nuances with an effect of rendering Thunberg's mass-media-based image far more relatable.

Particularly helpful to young readers might be Camerini's sensitive addressing of the emotional and interpersonal difficulties Thunberg has worked through in order to carry out her convictions, and the importance of support networks in making this possible. Nine short chapters, each at approximately 15 pages long, are accompanied with images of Thunberg's activist peers illustrated by Veronica 'Veci' Carratello. Further sections

follow entitled 'Explaining Global Warming to Children' and 'What Can We Do?' A glossary and a timeline toward the history of human pollution and global warming come next, before Camerini signposts readers to further resources to continue, if they so wish, carrying on researching Thunberg's work in relation to wider civil disobedience movements.

Lily Dyu, **Earth Heroes: 20 Inspiring Stories of People Saving Our World**, pub. Nosy Crow

Lily Dyu brings together a selection of twenty individuals from around the world demonstrating the broad and united global effort to 'save our world'. It is almost as if Dyu's book is one sampler: each individual (chapter) is a thread that collectively makes up a woven fabric (book). There could be so many other such samplers demonstrating various climate justice projects worldwide juxtaposed: Dyu includes twenty Earth Heroes – including for example Greta Thunberg in Sweden, Isatou Ceesay in the Gambia, Yin Yuhzen in northern China, Mohammed Rezwan in Bangladesh – no doubt there could be 20,000 more.

Dyu encourages the fabric's growth, her conclusion entitled 'You Too Can Change the World' encourages young readers to stand up for what they believe in and work together. Big names often dominate news headlines; Dyu's colourfully bound and playfully illustrated book goes some way in diversifying the celebration of change-making individuals, with a non-western-centric visioning for collective heroic ambition over individualistic heroes in competition, packed with rich information and description to educate and inspire.

Dougie Poynter, **Plastic Sucks! YOU Can Make a Difference**, pub. Macmillan

This green and black comic-look book provides an eclectic and broad brief introduction the plastic scene today, with specific focus on ocean-impact.

Dougie Poynter, most commonly known perhaps as former member of pop band McFly, encourages readers' love and appreciation for the planet (with significant reverence for David Attenborough) in outlining a short history of plastic, in highlighting key climate change issues, and in collaborating with various professional and non-professional contributors to cover: plastic production and consumption statistics, plastic impact on aquatic food webs, 'The Attenborough Effect', single-use plastics, notions of 'zero-waste lifestyles', refillables, plastic free parties, plastic free packed lunches, unexpected plastic, plastic alternatives, marine biology, wildlife charities, viral campaigning, templates for writing letters to companies, the importance of bees, plastic pollution solution inventions, clean-up innovations, personal well-being, animal rights, decomposition rates, chemicals, recycling realities, and more.

A glossary at the back helps readers with some specialised vocabulary, and a 'Meet the Experts' section provides examples of future roles interested young people might fill.

Jeremy Strong and Jamie Smith, **Nellie Choc-Ice and the Plastic Island**, pub. Barrington Stoke

Nellie Choc-Ice, the most-famous penguin Arctic explorer, has travelled 12,430 miles from South to North Pole. To get back home, Nellie submarine-hitches with Captain Beardy-Beard, but the crew gets stuck twice: once (in New York harbour) due to Nellie's misunderstanding of fossil-fuel-engines involving misplaced fishes in fuel tanks, and again (on escape after Nellie's accidental partial-destruction of the Statue of Liberty) in collision with a big floating clog of various plastic items out at sea. United in struggle to free themselves and others from 'Plastic Island', the crew resolve to expose their awful discoveries and hold those responsible to account.

After meeting with world leaders at Rio de Janeiro (alluding to Earth Summits 1992 and 2012), a clean up operation is immediately actioned and preventative measures put in place. All enjoy worldwide acclaim in their success, co-reflecting on their journey before finally taking Nellie home to a vigorously hugging and admiring family who are throwing a big party under the aurora australis.

Jeremy Strong's humour, visualised by Jamie Smith in a lovely sort-of friendly-punkish drawing style, helps bring light to a murky reality, stressing the importance of working together, friendship, maintaining hope amidst difficulty, celebrating achievement, and – crucially – the role of democracy and government in making necessary changes for planetary wellbeing.

David Attenborough, Matt Whyman, Richard Jones, and Colin Butfield, **Our Planet: The**

One Place We All Call Home, pub. HarperCollins

As with most of the books mentioned here, *Our Planet* seems to make another resounding and collectivising call for action: in the foreword, David Attenborough compels readers (whom he refers to as ‘characters’) to ‘tell the most extraordinary story of all – how human beings in the twenty-first century came to their senses and started to protect Planet Earth and all the other wonderful forms of life with which we share it’.

Next comes image-rich biome-organised sections: ‘Our Frozen Worlds’, ‘Our Jungles’, ‘Our Coastal Seas’, ‘Our Deserts & Grasslands’, ‘Our High Seas’, ‘Our Fresh Water’, ‘Our Forests’ (echoing protest language popularised by Thunberg aforementioned? ‘Who’s streets?’ ‘Our streets!’ ‘Whose Planet?’ ‘Our planet!’ etc.?) in repeating format: ‘All About Our Frozen Worlds’, ‘Stories From Our Frozen Worlds’, ‘Protecting Our Frozen Worlds’, and then ‘All About Our Jungles’, ‘Stories From Our Jungles’, ‘Protecting Our Jungles’ (you get the picture).

A glossary provides explanations for specialist language, and an index encourages nonlinear interaction with each interconnected biome-chapter, visualised on a map at the book’s start. Ending passages ‘One Chance’/‘One Future’ provide a final manifesto for the urgent actioning of necessary changes to slow damage and bring balance.

Lee Bacon, **The Last Human**, pub. Piccadilly Press

XR_935 is a robot who lives in a posthuman world. Humans messed up: their damage to the planet could no longer be tolerated, and the robots they created felt they had no choice other than to remove their existence from Earth. Things function very well without humanity; war, pollution, and crime are absent. The robots Unplug, leave home with their FamilyUnit, complete the day at their WorkSite, return home, and repeat every day under the direction of the Hive and the PRESIDENT. But on finding a prohibited LifeForm – Emma – XR_935 finds its systems challenged, and can’t find a logic that justifies the extermination of this human toxin that is proving to contradict expected and warned-against threatening characteristics (‘vanity’, ‘illogic’, etc.).

How can XR_935 and Emma co-exist? All is brought into question. Lee Bacon sets up a dichotomy between ‘bad’ humans and ‘good’ robots, playing the two against each other throughout *The Last Human* and bringing into question all of the things it might mean to be human. Readers might see characteristics of their daily existence in both categories, encouraging critical engagement in thinking about ways of being, and our broader effects therewith. Questioning aspects of civilisation including language, emotion, behaviour, communication, empathy, justice, and more, Bacon defamiliarizes human experience providing fresh and provocative perspectives on our present interactions in what has been termed ‘anthropocene’.

The Last Human tells a story of Earth continuing without humans: Bacon encourages us to find a way not to save the planet, but to save the human/our humanity.

To find out further up-to-date information on climate matters and related issues, please explore the following links to some of the larger UK-based environmental organisations:

Centre for Alternative Technology,
<https://www.cat.org.uk/>

The Climate Coalition,
<https://www.theclimatecoalition.org/>

Climate and Migration Coalition,
<http://climatemigration.org.uk/>

Forest School Association,
<https://www.forestscholassociation.org/>

Fossil Free, <https://gofossilfree.org/uk/>

Friends of the Earth, <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/>

Global Justice Now,
<https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/>

Greenpeace, <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/>

People & Planet, <https://peopleandplanet.org/>

Permaculture Association,
<https://www.permaculture.org.uk/>

RSPB, <https://www.rspb.org.uk/>

The Woodland Trust,
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/?gclid=aw.ds>

Mrs Wordsmith

Victoria Wharam has been making use of the Mrs Wordsmith publications for her own teaching and was inspired to write a feature article on them for us here at Armadillo. Read on to find out who Mrs Wordsmith are, what they do and what Victoria thought of the books ...

Who is Mrs Wordsmith?

Mrs Wordsmith is a bright, bold and innovative company who are bringing the art of learning vocabulary bang up to date. Their mission is to “teach every child in the world the 10,000 words they need to succeed” and boy have they got the resources to do it!

Their collection of books, games and apps have been scientifically researched to compliment the National Curriculum, but more importantly than that, to appeal to children and ignite the adventurous word learner in each of them. The team of award-winning Hollywood artists, including the artist behind the amazing Madagascar characters, bring every word to life.

Mrs Wordsmith and Dyslexia

I work with children who have dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties and I have found all of these products to be very adaptable. I have used them with children older than the intended audience successfully. The products are so colourful and appealing and introducing some very ambitious vocabulary, you would never know the age group it is designed for. The visuals are spectacular and are a great starting point for a discussion. The word pairs are excellent for helping to use the words in a structured sentence. The older children also found the morphology aspect interesting and this helped them to remember the new vocabulary.

Displaying the word-a-day flip chart is a great way to increase exposure to new vocabulary and make learning new words part of the daily routine. The cartoons are also a fantastic way of exposing children to new words and they really do help them to remember. Through the use of hilarious illustrations and child-friendly definitions, Mrs Wordsmith have made words fun and less intimidating and this makes learning accessible to every child. Ecstatic, exhilarated and overjoyed are just a few words I could use to express my emotions...

Storyteller’s Word a Day – Ages 7-11

With 180 words, flip the page every day to display and learn a new word. This book is designed to be easily displayed with a full-page bright and colourful illustration used to visually represent each word. The children love the pictures and will usually start discussing them without realising. Once interested, you can turn the word stand around and look at the word in more detail. Word pairs are

given so the child can see how to use it, along with synonyms and the history of the word which older children find interesting. There is even a story starter for every word that gets the creative juices flowing!

The Storyteller's Illustrated Dictionary – Ages 7-11

This is a dictionary like no other; no longer just page after page of words that are 'boring' and sometimes intimidating, but bright, accessible and appealing in a user-friendly format. It is divided into 6 themes (character, weather, taste and smell, action, emotions, settings) to make it easier to locate the words they need for their story. Jam-packed with illustrations, this dictionary provides more than just spellings; all of the illustrated words provide 3 word-pair examples, a definition and a sample sentence.

These features really help the children to get inspired and use the words correctly in their own writing. The only downside with this is the amount of time you can spend looking at it before choosing the best word; I have had to use a timer to make sure we don't get too engrossed!

The Storyteller's Card Game - Age 7+

Another way to improve children's storytelling ability and confidence is through this card game. With 300 illustrated word cards based on the six key storytelling themes of the dictionary, the idea is to provide the best word to go with the story card, for example, words for ... a haunted castle could be put down, players then choose the best word card they have to go with the sentence. The winner keeps the card and the first player to collect five story cards wins.

This is a game for three or more players, but I have adapted it to use in a 1:1 situation (with a little imagination!) and this also works well. I just love the illustrations and they never fail to provide a point for discussion.

My Epic Life Word Book – Ages 4-6

Aimed at the younger audience, this is indeed an epic introduction to vocabulary. Once again, the fabulous illustrations keep the pages turning. Words associated with everyday life things such as emotions, food and hygiene, basic maths and the future of technology are brought to life. Word pairs and definitions help the child to understand the main word. I have also used this with older children who have literacy difficulties and they have also really enjoyed it.

One of the best features is tucked away at the back of the book in the form of word cartoons; all you need is a QR scanner to bring the words to life. It is so effective that weeks later children have used the words in conversation because they can visualise the cartoon.

Blah, Blah, Blah – Age 4+

Bursting out of this little box of delights are three phonic card games (easy, medium, hard). The rules are the same for each deck; be the first to get rid of all of your cards, but remember, you must say

blah, blah, blah to win otherwise you have to draw four more cards! These are such fun games to play for developing phonic skills and once you have got used to all the extra ha ha, wah wah and cha cha wild cards, it can become fast and wild!

The children really enjoy it and don't even realise they are practicing their phonics. A real winner!

What on Earth Books

Christopher Lloyd, writer and co-founder of *What on Earth Books* with illustrator Andy Forshaw, challenges conventional knowledge and traditional book formats to publish exciting non-fiction books aimed at young people aged 7+. Armadillo Magazine's Simon Barrett managed to finally pin Chris down and speak with him on the telephone ... he is a very busy man! Simon's feature concludes with a series of mini reviews.

What on Earth Books embodies Chris' philosophy of knowledge, perhaps best summed up in the title of his May 5th 2014 blog, 'Connecting the dots of the past'. His central argument is that a child's curiosity is so important for acquiring knowledge, stimulating children to want to find out more. Sadly in his family's experience school did the opposite, his eldest child complaining, aged 7, that school was boring. This prompted Chris and his wife choosing to home-educate their girls, Matilda and Verity. Chris argues for a more holistic approach to knowledge that resists separating subjects and, perhaps more importantly as our environmental conscience grows, making connections between the natural world and human society. He fondly recalls Matilda's love of penguins when she was being home schooled, and how by nurturing this interest, Matilda also learnt about Antarctica and poetry by exploring poems about penguins.

The phenomena that is *What on Earth Books* began in 2010. Chris published his first wallbook *The Big History Timeline Wallbook*, a children's version of his first book *What on Earth Happened* (Bloomsbury). He followed this up with a further five wallbooks on sport,

natural history, science, the works of William Shakespeare and British history, managing to publish a wallbook a year and continuing a family tradition of his great uncle, gardener and namesake, who also published a book a year. When writing these first wallbooks Chris describes how he was reinventing the old idea of a timeline. He spent months sketching out the timeline -- although he admits his drawings were not very good -- and redrafting the content that Andy Forshaw would later illustrate. He recalls the satisfaction of filling up a blank piece of paper as well as enjoying the challenge of compiling all the information into one timeline, comparing the feeling of seeing the finished book to that of a carpenter finishing a handcrafted piece of furniture.

At the time wallbooks were experimental. The books can be read from cover to cover. They also concertina-out, extending to a two metre timeline to display on a wall or lay out on the floor. Each wallbook, complete with a pocket magnifier, is a feast of facts awaiting discovery. I remember receiving my first review copies of the wallbooks, pouring over the pages and delighting in the cacophony of information. There is often a palatable awe and wonder when a wallbook unfurls. In the beginning, Chris explains, wallbooks were distributed through schools and at fairs, where wallbooks could be opened up and that is what people loved. It was more difficult however to distribute wallbooks through bookshops: the larger dimensions and no spine meant wallbooks were difficult for booksellers to stock. Early on, there were also exciting collaborations with prestigious British institutions including the Natural History

Museum, the National Trust, the Science Museum and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. At first Chris describes chance encounters that led to such collaborations. Given Chris' vivacious appetite for life and passion for education, I am not surprised he capitalised on such chances. In 2009 for instance he was recreating Charles Darwin's voyage on HMS Beagle when he happened to meet Sarah Darwin, great-granddaughter of Charles Darwin and who was married to the keeper of Botany at the Natural History Museum, thereby gaining an introduction to the Natural History Museum.

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was one of the first institutions to approach him, wanting to re-engage young people with Shakespeare and gain a greater appreciation of his plays other than having studied a play at school usually in isolation from the rest of Shakespeare's works. *The Shakespeare Timeline wallbook* shows all 38 histories, comedies and tragedies by William Shakespeare, allowing readers to identify themes within Shakespeare's work, such as the number of shipwrecks and ghosts. Despite having amazing facts and stories within these hallowed institutions, as Chris explains sometimes these institutions did not have the time or knowledge to imaginatively present them to children.

Typically Chris and his team would meet, brainstorm ideas, go away, draft ideas and create a final version that the institutional experts checked for accuracy. The result was therefore an authoritative scholarly text, accessible and exciting for young people to read and enjoy.

Chris is a great storyteller, famous for his coat of many pockets. Talks and presentations are something he loves. I had the privilege of being educated and entertained by Chris when he was promoting *The Science Timeline Wallbook* at the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, London. The coat of many pockets is, as Chris explains, an element of amateur dramatics: everyday objections relating to important events and discoveries are placed in different pockets for children to come up and take out. Chris then explains the significance of each object, making connections to people and places hundreds and thousands of years ago. The ordinary -- even a toilet roll -- becomes the extraordinary through Chris' amazing stories, seen as the tip of an iceberg of a greater story, re-animating the way we see the world. As he states in the mission statement of *What on Earth Books*: "the real world is far more amazing than anything you can make up!"

What on Earth Books continues to experiment with formats. Chris is emphatic that print has so much more to offer and in a digital age a learning experience that cannot be replicated on a screen. The original wallbooks have been revised and a new 'fold-out graphic novel' published, *North America*, a geography and history of a continent. North America is eight feet and 15,000 years of history worth exploring! The pocket magnifier is also reinvented as a magical lens in books, such as *Monsters*. Cleverly the magical lens allows children to reveal hidden knowledge using the optical illusion of a red reveal, knowledge they can share with family and friends. In addition, flaps allow children to explore layers within books. For example, *Eye Spy* explains to readers how an animal sees and by lifting a flap readers actually see the world through the

animal’s eyes. The thickness of board books allows cuts and holes and more opportunities for readers to look ahead in anticipation, curious about future pages. Finally, many of the *What on Earth Books* include quizzes and activities so children can consolidate information and use their learning in a fun way. All of this, for Chris, allows a more immersive, tactile experience, crucial to any learning.

What on Earth Books is growing. Since 2016 the publishing house produces between 15-20 books a year, written by a number of different authors. The central vision of *What on Earth Books* however remains focused on stimulating children’s curiosity by looking at subjects from a completely different perspective. The delightful homophone of the recently published *Nose Knows*, for example, explains how the sense of smell works and the way animals smell the world differently from human beings. There are plenty of yucky facts appealing to children. *Unseen Worlds* showcases microscopic life in water, soil and our own homes entirely invisible to human eyes. The book definitely leaves uncomfortable thoughts as you take a walk, snuggle into bed or reach into a cupboard. *Humanimal* turns on its head our belief that humans are somehow separate

from animals, exploring instead the shared characteristics of humans and animals. While some of the information may be familiar to readers, such as how bees work as a team, that elephants seem to mourn or chimpanzees use tools. The detail is interesting and there is much more to learn, for example, leafcutter ants farm fungus, ants that milk aphids and the existence of intelligent slime mould (which is helping plan human transport systems).

STOP PRESS! What on Earth Books has signed a contract, working in partnership with Encyclopedia Britannica to publish a new children’s encyclopedia *The All New Britannica Kids Encyclopedia: What We Know and What We Don’t*. This will be the first Encyclopedia Britannica publication for 10 years. The subtitle is particularly important for Chris because there is so much we don’t know. We have ideas and opinions, but sometimes we don’t know why, for example why life suddenly changed from simple to more complex forms from which all the biodiversity of our planet arises. This is something to be excited about: knowledge is an open book.

Thank you Chris for your time and an inspiring discussion about children, curiosity and knowledge.

<p>Unseen Worlds Helène Rajcak, illus. Damien Laverdunt</p> <p><i>Unseen Worlds</i> explores the normally invisible microscopic life on planet Earth. From the</p>	<p>Prehistoric Kathleen Weidner Zoehfeld, illus. Julius Csotonyi</p> <p><i>Prehistoric</i> travels back over 4 billion years from the present day, where humans dominate the</p>	<p>North America Sarah Albee, illus. William Exley</p> <p><i>North America</i> as a fold-out graphic history presents a mind-boggling amount of information in a creative, imaginative way</p>
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<p>jungles underwater, on land and even in our beds, there are enough grossly fascinating facts and bizarre creatures to make every reader twitch, itch and scratch. It is not just what is feeding on other things, it is also what is feeding on you!</p>	<p>planet, through all the eons of Earth to the very beginning of life. The vastness of this time is perhaps best appreciated in the last chapter. Here time is compressed into 12 hours with human history beginning 3 minutes before 12 o'clock.</p>	<p>that often challenges our perceptions of this part of the world. Sadly there are wars and disasters, but there are also inventions, great architecture, monuments, industry, social progression and radicals.</p>
<p>Humanimal Christopher Lloyd, illus. Mark Ruffle</p> <p><i>Humanimal</i> explores three main forms of behaviour shared by humans and animals: community, feelings and intelligence. Using scientific research based upon sometimes years of observation, there is a wealth of information about the ways in which animals work, build, live and have fun together.</p>	<p>Nose Knows Emmanuelle Figueras, illus. Claire De Gastold</p> <p><i>Nose Knows</i> gives a fascinating insight into the noses of wild animals and the extent to which their sense of smell operates. There are plenty of strange-but-true facts that will appeal to young readers, such as the two noses of snails and sharks! <i>Nose Knows</i> opens up the whole new natural world of smell.</p>	<p>Absolutely Everything! Christopher Lloyd, illus. Andy Forshaw</p> <p><i>Absolutely Everything!</i> covers the entire history of the universe from its very beginning 13.8 billion years ago to the present day. The mind-boggling timescales of natural history lead into the centuries of human history as we travel around the globe from Asia to the Americas in a book that must be Lloyd's <i>magnus opus</i>.</p>

Picture books

A Dragon on the Roof: A Children's Book

Inspired by Antoni Gaudí

Cécile Alix, illus. Fred Sochard

The Adventures of Moose & Mr Brown

Paul Smith, illus. Sam Usher

Be More Bernard

Simon Philip, illus. Kate Hindley

The Child of Dreams

Irena Brignull, illus. Richard Jones

Fair Shares

Pippa Goodhart, illus. Anna Doherty

Free

Sam Usher

The Girl and the Dinosaur

Hollie Hughes, illus. Sarah Massini

The Golden Cage or The True Story of the Blood Princess

Anna Castagnoli, illus. Carll Cneut, trans.

Laura Watkinson

The Hairdo that Got Away

Joseph Coelho, illus. Fiona Lumbers

Herring Hotel

Didier Levy, illus. Serge Bloch

It's a No Money Day

Kate Milner

The King and the Gifts of Gold

Georg Dreissig, illus. Maren Briswalter

The Little Island

Smriti Prasad-Halls, illus. Robert Starling

Little Pearl

Martin Widmark, illus. Emilia Dziubak

Madame Badobedah

Sophie Dahl, illus. Lauren O'Hara

Mum's Jumper

Jayne Perkin

My Hair

Hannah Lee, illus. Allen Fatimaharan

Read this Book if You Don't Want A Story

Richard Phillips, illus. Eric Zelz

The Sand Elephant

Rinna Hermann, illus. Sanne Dufft

The Secret of the Tattered Shoes

Jackie Morris, illus. Ehsan Abdollahi

The Star in the Forest

Helen Kellock

Starbird

Sharon King-Chai

Sulwe

Lupita Nyong'o, illus. Vashiti Harrison

Together

Clover Robin, illus. Isabel Otter

**The Ultimate Survival Guide to Monsters
Under the Bed**

Mitch Frost, illus. Daron Parton

The Ups and Downs of the Castle Mice

Michael Bond, illus. Emily Sutton

What I Like Most

Mary Murphy, illus. Zhu Cheng-Liang

What's That Noise?

Naomi Howarth

Yum Yummy Yuck

Cree Lane, illus. Amanda Jane Jones

Junior books

Boy Giant: Son of Gulliver

Michael Morpurgo, illus. Michael Foreman

Butterflies for Grandpa Joe

Nicola Davies, illus. Mike Byrne

Eight Princesses and a Magic Mirror

Natasha Farrant, illus. Lydia Corry

The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone

Jaclyn Moriarty

Flembler: The Secret Book

Jamie Smart

FloodWorld

Tom Huddleston

The Fowl Twins

Eoin Colfer

Frostheart

Jamie Littler

The Girl Who Lost her Shadow

Emily Ilett

The Girl Who Speaks Bear

Sophie Anderson, illus. Kathrin Honesta

The Goldsmith and the Master Thief

Tonke Dragt

Guardians of Magic: Cloud Horse Chronicles #1

Chris Riddell

Harriet versus the Galaxy

Samantha Baines, illus. Jessica Flores

The International Yeti Collective

Paul Mason, illus. Katy Riddell

Kitty and the Moonlight Rescue

Paul Harrison, illus. Jennie Lovlie

The Land of Roar

Jenny McLachlan, illus. Ben Mantle

Lori and Max

Catherine O'Flynn

Max Kowalski Didn't Mean It

Susie Day

Nevertell

Katharine Orton, illus. Rovina Cai, cover illus. Sandra Dieckmann

The Pearl in the Ice

Cathryn Constable

The Runaways

Holly Webb

Shadows Of Winterspell

Amy Wilson

The Space We're In

Katya Balen, illus. Laura Carlin

The Taylor Turbochaser

David Baddiel

The Time of Green Magic

Hilary McKay

Uki and the Outcasts

Kieran Larwood

White Fox

Chen Jiatong, trans. Jennifer Feeley, illus.

Viola Wang

The Wind in the Wall

Sally Gardner, illus. Rovina Cai

With the Fire on High

Elizabeth Acevedo, illus. Erick Davila

Young Adult books

Aphra's Child

Lesley Glaister

The Austen Girls

Lucy Worsley

The Beautiful

Renée Ahdieh

Call Down the Hawk

Maggie Stiefvater

Chessboxer

Stephen Davies

The Deathless Girls

Kiran Millwood Hargrave

Deeplight

Frances Hardinge, illus. Oslo Davis

The End and Other Beginnings

Veronica Roth, illus. Ashley Mackenzie

The Fountains of Silence

Ruta Sepetys

Frankly in Love

David Yoon

Free Lunch

Rex Ogle

Full Disclosure

Camryn Garrett

The Good Hawk

Joseph Elliott

The Good Luck Girls

Charlotte Nicole Davis

Guts

Raina Telgemeier

Illegal

Miriam Halahmy

In the Key of Code

Aimee Lucido

Into the Crooked Place

Alexandra Christo, illus. Patrick Knowles

Invisible in a Bright Light

Sally Gardner

Jackpot

Nic Stone

The Last Human

Lee Bacon

The Liars

Jennifer Matheiu

Look Both Ways

Jason Reynolds, illus. Selom Senu

The M Word

Brian Conaghan

Night of the Party

Tracey Mathias

The Places I've Cried in Public

Holly Bourne

Scars Like Wings

Erin Stewart

Sea Change

Sylvia Hehir

Slay

Brittney Morris

Summerland

Lucy Adlington

White Eagles

Elizabeth Wein

The Wrong Side of Kai

Estelle Maskame

Non-Fiction books

5 Wild Shapes

Camilla Falsini

Adventures On Earth

Simon Tyler

Anatomicum

Curated by Katy Wiedmann and Jennifer Z Paxton

Atlas of Amazing Birds

Matt Sewell

Children Who Changed The World: Incredible True Stories About Children's Rights

Marcia Williams

Darwin's Voyage of Discovery

Jake Williams

The Explanatorium of Science

Robert Winston

Explorers

Nellie Huang and Jessamy Hawke

Forgotten Fairy Tales of Brave and Brilliant Girls

Foreword by Kate Pankhurst

The History of Prehistory

Mick Manning and Brita Granström

How Many Points For A Panda?

Hilda Offen

Into the Deep: An Exploration of Our Oceans

Dr Wolfgang Dreyer and Annika Siems

Inventor Lab

Jack Challoner

Ladybird Tales of Superheroes

The Lost Fairy Tales

Retold by Isabel Otter, illus. Ana Sender

National Trust: Step Inside Homes Through History

Goldie Hawk, illus. Sarah Gibb

Nine Worlds in Nine Nights. A Journey Through Imaginary Lands

Hiawyn Oran, illus. David Wyatt

North America

Sarah Albee, illus. William Exley

Refugees

Brian Bilston, illus. José Sanabria

Shakespeare for Every Day of the Year

Allie Esiri

Together

Isabel Otter and Clover Robin

Walk This Underground World

Kate Baker and Sam Brewster

Who Am I?

Rachel Clare, photography Tim Flach

Wild Girls. How to have Incredible Outdoor Adventures

Helen Skelton, illus. Liz Kay

**WildLives. 50 Extraordinary Animals
that made History**

Ben Lerwin, illus. Sarah Walsh

The Wonders of Nature

Ben Hoare, illus. Angela Rizza and Daniel Long