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Picturebooks

A Horse Called Now

Ruth Doyle, illus. Alexandra Finkeldey, pub. Nosy Crow

Ruth Doyle's *A Horse Called Now* is a powerful story that helps readers understand their fears and find ways to breathe through these moments. It is not billed as being a mindfulness book, but it is easy to imagine that it could be a very useful one, giving children a new perspective on how to understand and manage stressful moments.

Now is a horse with wisdom which is used intelligently to reassure those animals who seek refuge with her. The rabbits, hen and her chicks, and the sheep all come quickly to Now who asks them to share their fears. As they do, she calmly tells them to stop and find some food while she stands guard. Now wants to share in the fears of the other animals, she wants to use her wisdom to advise them, she wants to look after them but also reassure them they can learn how to be brave too.

When a storm rumbles in all the animals head into the barn where a few fears are lying in wait for them. Now calmly helps them all to learn that even the scariest critters feel fear themselves. As they all huddle together to wait out the storm, it is Now and her calming presence that comforts all the creatures hiding with her.

A brilliantly explored look at fear, worries, and being present in the moment. Stunning illustrations bring the story to full colour life and there are plenty of details to search for as you turn the pages.

Erin Hamilton

Alberta: A Cautionary Tale

Margaret Sturton, pub. Andersen Press

Alberta: A Cautionary Tale presents a fantastic twist on the well-loved and well-known tale of Red Riding Hood. We all know that the big bad Wolf causes the upset in that story when he tries to trick Little Red by posing as grandma, so it comes as a fun twist to discover that Alberta, a young girl is the naughty one in this story, written and illustrated by Margaret Sturton.

Alberta has had a bad day, she has been disrupting people, crying, and chewing on books (please don't try this at home or in a library!) Despite the amount of trouble she causes she always manages to avoid getting herself into trouble by smiling sweetly at everyone. She has been told not to go into the woods but when she spies an interesting character, she follows and befriends them.

You might wonder why she didn't listen to the adults? Her reason is to steal the delicious birthday cake that Red Riding Wolf made for granny. And so it is that when Red Riding Wolf falls asleep, Alberta munches the cake. Her naughtiness is discovered by Red Riding Wolf when he wakes up and we, along with Alberta discover that he does indeed have a big nose, big eyes and ... gulp ... big teeth!

We later see Granny and Red Riding Wolf enjoying a large pie! Who knows what happened to Alberta... Funny and cautionary, this story will be a firm favourite at bedtimes!

Erin Hamilton

The Colour Monster: The Feelings Doctor and the Emotions Toolkit

Anna Llenas, pub. Templar Books

Have you met the colour monster yet? He is a wonderfully versatile character who has already helped children with going to school. Now he is back, and this time he is in the guise of a doctor, ready to help Nuna, the main character.

Nuna needs someone to talk to and the Colour Monster fits the bill perfectly. He is approachable, he listens, he advises but he does not judge. He really is the perfect someone to talk to, and not in the least a scary monster! It helps that Anna Llenas, as both author and illustrator has been able to show us just how approachable and child-friendly he is. The illustration is incredibly expressive, resonant of a children's colouring book (or one of mine!) it truly does make full use of colour to express emotion yet also manages to demonstrate a sophistication of thought.

When Nuna wakes up feeling strange, dazed, and confused she knows a visit to the Colour Monster is going to be just what she needs, and today he is The Feelings Doctor who can help to heal her emotions. Why does she need help with this? Because there are some emotions that are so BIG they can be difficult to experience. With swirls of colour, disarmingly accurate in their simplicity, Anna Llenas shows us how our emotions could look if we were to draw them. When we learn that Nuna has a feeling in her tummy that she can't describe that swirl of colour becomes black and grey – upsetting and grim. Not to worry though for the Colour Monster Doctor knows just how to help. He has an emotions toolkit and, along with Nuna, we can open it up to find out what he keeps inside.

So begins the next stage, the part that is going to help Nuna manage her feelings and emotions. From deep breathing and green balloons to squishing clay and colouring – from outside in or inside out, there is no right and wrong we learn as we also share in blowing bubbles and dancing. I felt calmer after sharing this story and I know I will be coming back to it, and sharing it, even following the instructions for making a Wellness Toolkit. A conversation starter and an inspiration.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Confetti: A colourful celebration of love and life

Dean Atta, illus. Alea Marley, pub. Orchard Books

Arianna (Ari) is a little black girl with curly hair which is tied up in two wayward bunches on top of her head, and a big smile.

When we meet her, she has just found a piece of pink confetti under the sofa, she remembers her third birthday party, and then she remembers the fun of going to a Pride march with her uncle, waving her rainbow flag. She remembers that on both occasions there was confetti. Now, as she is about to become a big sister, mum has a baby shower. At the shower there is yellow confetti. When baby Andia (Andi) is born, uncle takes both girls to the park, and throws leaves like confetti. Then uncle gets married, and Ari throws confetti in all the colours of the rainbow flag: in the evening, the fireworks are like confetti in the sky. Snow is like cold confetti, and when she throws a snowball at uncle it explodes into confetti.

Dean Atta is a British poet of Greek Cypriot and Caribbean descent, and an award-winning novelist. In 2012, his poem *I Am Nobody's Nigger*, written in response to the use of the racial slur by the murderers of Stephen Lawrence, achieved much social media coverage, and he has been listed by The Independent newspaper as one of the 100 most influential LGBT people in the United Kingdom. He dedicates this picture book to Ari and Andi, so it seems that the girls are his own family, and he is the uncle of the story. Alea Marley was born in the UK, but her family roots are in Barbados. She is an award-winning illustrator known for her use of colour and texture, and her style suits this delightful celebration of love and life well.

Diana Barnes

Flying High

Cao Wenxuan, trans. Jake Hope and Simone-Davina Monnelly, illus. Yu Rong, pub. UCLan Publishing

This is another picture book about accepting being different, but here the difference the author is addressing is that of a child, probably a boy (unnamed), who is smaller than the other children who don't want to fly kites with him.

The little boy's best friend is a little blue bird, possibly imaginary, called Wawa, who flies as high as his kite. When his kite tangles up those belonging to other children, they are cross and say he is too small to be with them. When someone stamps on his kite, he throws it into the river and sulks. Wawa

comforts him and leads him through different sorts of reeds and trees to the beach where they find a lot of pebbles, all different, and Wawa wheels around with a flock of seagulls, who are different from her. The boy remembers the festival where people had dressed up in different ways, returns to the town, rubs out the mark on the wall that shows how small he is, and declares, “I am who I am! I’m as tall as I am, whether I’m tall or small.” He goes to visit his grandparents who help him make a new and splendid kite which flies so high that everyone cheers: they are all friends, and he is happy being himself.

Cao Wenxuan grew up in rural China and is now a professor of Chinese literature and children’s literature at Beijing University. A bestselling author of children’s literature, he has won many academic and literary awards. His own childhood was miserable, and he hopes, through his writing, to help children deal with any unhappiness, and appreciate the beauty of the world around them. This translation by Jake Hope and Simone-Davina Monnelly flows well and will be good to read aloud and share.

The illustrations are interesting: faces, hands, and bare feet are all drawn naturalistically in pencil, but clothing and scenery are partly colourful paintings and partly more angular collage. Yu Rong had previously trained as a primary school teacher, and her style usually involves paper-cutting: she has won her many awards both in China and in this country, where she now lives, and been shortlisted for many more.

Diana Barnes

Meet the Wildlings

Gwen Millward, pub. Templar books

Learning to share is a skill that most of us learn at an early age, especially when there are siblings. However, if children are just getting used to being with others there might be problems. The dynamics change as soon as any of us have to allow others into our circles no matter what our age.

In Gwen Millward’s delightful *Meet the Wildlings*, the two children, Max and Poppy, are playing well together until Poppy takes Max’s lorry and won’t return it. Tempers flare and the two young children turn into ‘wildlings’, which look like large and furry monsters. Their parents just don’t know what to do and try all of distraction treats that they would normally use, and that normally works; from shopping, swimming, car rides to cinema visits, nothing works. Eventually the two children discover that they are able to return to their normal selves, they remember how to get along when they work together to solve a problem i.e. how to open a bag of crisps.

The author has combined an extremely funny story about sibling rivalry with a very serious topic, which most parents have had to deal with at some time. Very young children are still finding out what

their boundaries are whilst realising that the world does not always revolve round only them. Poppy and Max discover that being angry or grumpy is not helpful and can often stop them doing what they enjoy. They also find that helping each other can have its rewards and that there is magic in saying 'sorry' at times. This is a bright and lively story for the very young and will work very well in nursery and KS1 classrooms as well as at home where it might be that some sibling rivalry needs to be resolved!

Margaret Pemberton

Misty Mole

Dr Yasmin El-Rouby, illus. Ishy Walters, pub. Neem Tree Press

There is a new mole on the block, and he has some important things to share with young picturebook readers. So excited is he about his stories, his experiences, sharing them, that he features in three stories that are publishing simultaneously. Meet Misty Mole. You can find him in *Misty Mole and the Big Switch-Off*; *Misty Mole and the Eating Adventure*; *Misty Mole Gets New Glasses*. All three have been written by Dr Yasmin El-Rouby and illustrated by Ishy Walters. When I tell you that the author is an eye doctor passionate about raising the profile of vision disorders the choice of a mole as her main character likely makes a lot of sense and Ishy Walters imagining of how Misty looks is perfectly adorable!

Do you have a mobile phone? Are there children in your life who have mobile phones or are there some who don't? Misty doesn't have a mobile phone or a tablet, but her friends do, and it is making her feel frustrated. But the more all her friends use their devices the more they find their eyes getting sore and blurry and they are struggling to sleep. It's up to Misty to find ways to reduce screen time and restore some good old-fashioned fun in the woodlands. But that is not all, Misty is kept busy with Granny Mole too. Granny is eating so many treats that her eyesight is being affected. An adventure involving a balloon ride could be the key to showing Granny Mole the importance of good food as they hunt for a rainbow of foods! Finally, after all this focus on eyesight and the importance of looking after ourselves to ensure we have healthy eyes, Misty realises she too needs to have an eye test so that her painting becomes less blurry! It's time for Misty to get her first pair of glasses...

In three relatable stories children can find a new character, a new setting, a new set of adventures and they can begin to understand not only the importance of looking after your eyes but more about how to balance the use of technology and remembering to eat healthily. A charming trio of books perfect for the classroom.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

One Goose, Two Moose

Kael Tudor, illus. Nicola Slater, pub. Scholastic

Welcome to the ice cream shop, where there's lots of tasty treats on offer (check out those end papers, they are completely edible!) and TWO queues - a moose line and a goose line. There's also a slightly bossy goose who wants everyone queueing IN THE RIGHT LINE! It sounds easy enough, doesn't it?

Children will love joining in with the 'One goose, two moose, three goose, FOUR,' refrain throughout the book AND spotting which moose OR goose is in the WRONG place. While their grown-ups will have some tongue-twisting fun trying to read all the 'goose's and 'moose's in the RIGHT place. Be prepared to be corrected on more than occasion, possibly even having to start again! Counting and queuing are both given equal consideration in this wonderfully silly and slightly anarchic story which will quickly become a firm favourite.

This debut picturebook is a delight. Kael knows his stuff and the humour is pitched just right for the age range. Nicola Slater's illustrations are the perfect companion to Kael's text and have so much character. My particular favourites are the weightlifting moose in a leopard print leotard AND the moose with a book on her head, but of course... Simon the adorably bossy crowd controlling goose steals the show.

Mariesa Dulak

Once Upon A Storytime

Gareth Peter, illus. Natelle Quek, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Once Upon A Storytime is a beautiful reassuring picture book that highlights the mother-daughter relationship by drawing on the plots of fairy tale favourites. As you read and share the story see which ones you can identify and find out if you know the stories they tell.

Nia loves her bedtime stories such as Hansel and Gretel, Beauty and the Beast, Jack and the Beanstalk and The Little Mermaid but wonders what would happen to her if she was in a similar situation. What if Nia was in the fairytale, what if that was Nia's story that was being told? Gareth Peter makes clever use of the 'what if...' scenario to capture children's imagination as they progress through then book and share in the stories. It is there when defeating wicked witches, trying to calm bullying beasts and grouchy giants, and overcoming menacing sea-monsters. It is fun as well to wonder 'What if...' in each of these situations.

With a theme of family togetherness, young children everywhere will be comforted by the underlying message of: 'we will always look out for each other no matter what.' Nia proves herself to be just as brave at heart as the heroes and heroines in the stories she hears at bedtime. I particularly liked the

ending for here we learn that Nia has to wait until ‘tomorrow’ for her next amazing adventure, reinforcing bedtime routines in a positive way.

The illustrations by Natelle Quek are magical and will draw young readers in. I look forward to seeing more picture books by this talented artist. *Once Upon A Storytime* is the ideal book for bedtimes.

Anita Loughery

Please!

Simon Philip, illus. Nathan Reed, pub. Bloomsbury Children’s Books

Do you know any magic words? I am sure we all know and love abracadabra and supercalifragilisticexpialidocious... But do you know of any other magic words? They crop up in stories all over the place, we need to remember they are not just make-believe; magic is not just make-believe. Don’t believe me? You could ask Simon Philip, author of *Please!* And Nathan Reed, the story illustrator. They will both tell you how real magic is and to prove it their story is all about a little boy called Bill. Prepare yourself for a wacky adventure as you explore this marvellous, explosive story...

Are you a grown-up who is constantly reminding children to use their manners, remember their manners? Are you a child who needs reminding, who forgets how important manners are? Then this is the book you need to read: right NOW!

It all began when Bill wanted some ice cream. The other children in line all said thank you to the ice cream van man. Bill? He demanded loads, six scoops! And he “forgotfully” to say please... Do you know what happened next? Alien toads kidnapped Bill. I know. It sounds crazy and unbelievable doesn’t it, but I have seen it for myself, it is very real. The toads have come all the way from Mars and when they take Bill back to their spaceship (they want him to tour the stars with them) he is not happy. He doesn’t want to see only the stars. No Billy demands to see the planets. Of course, he didn’t say please causing the spaceship to crash in the jungle where they collected a few more passengers. All this adventure made Bill hungry, he wanted an afternoon snack. Did he say please this time? NO... This caused them to crash into a Yak who ran into a fairy-tale with witches, knights, wizards. When Bill finally remembers to use his manners, the madness ends until... Until he remembers the importance of ‘please’ but forgets the ‘thank you... Story to be continued? I for one certainly hope we get a Thank You story, we are never going to tire of this one!

May Jonas

Vile Virginia and The Curse That Got Worse

Issy Emeney, illus. Chris Mould, pub. Simon and Schuster

In the second title in the series *Twisted tales for devilish darlings*, (the first story was Billy Brute) Issy Emeney here delights in the cautionary tale of mean Virginia.

Virginia is a bully and a tyrant, forced to share her bedroom with the delightful curly-haired Julian. Her mother dotes on Julian, and Virginia tries, in many entertaining ways, to get rid of him, but he always somehow manages gets out of trouble. Her visit to the library might leave chaos in her wake, but she borrows a book of magic and concocts a spell, hiding the resulting potion in her sock drawer. When delightful Julian brings her tea in bed she drinks it before realising that he has discovered the potion... But it's too late - and I won't spoil the fun by telling what happens...

Issy Emeney has been writing for many years as a full-time folk musician and songwriter, had made up stories for her daughters when they were much younger, and only now is she turning her talents to picture books. Chris Mould is a very experienced illustrator, with over 20 books to his name, and his spiky style is ideal for the evil Virginia and her plotting – this book is fun to read and shares with its young readers some important reminders about being nice, to everyone...

Diana Barnes

Who Rules the Rockpool?

Matty Long, illus. Matty Long, pub. Oxford University Press

This book provides a funny and informative look at the life to be found in a rockpool.

The central characters are Crab and Prawn. The former has a great deal of self-confidence and thinks that he rules the pool, but as Prawn points out, they are the only creatures in the pool. When a giant wave moves them into a deeper pool, they can see that there are many other sea creatures that might be a threat. Crab still maintains his confidence and is willing to fight larger foes, but surprisingly they all say that they are not rulers of the pool. It is only when he comes across a giant octopus that Crab realizes that he has met the true ruler and he needs to make his escape.

What a delightful introduction to the hierarchy of animals found along our shoreline. This can be read both as an information book for children in Early Years, but it is also a wonderful tale about not being too overconfident and when it is best to use a bit of discretion and hide.

There are some brilliant puns to be found lurking in the story and they are bound to raise a chuckle from the adult readers, for example when saying something that “Prawn thought was crackers.” The illustrations themselves are bright, clear, and full of energy; I particularly enjoyed the emotions that the author has been able to portray in images of Crab and Prawn. This will make a great addition to the nursery or KS1 classroom and will work so well before, or after, a visit to the beach.

Margaret Pemberton

Junior Books

Beastlands: Race to Frostfall Mountain

Jess French, pub. Piccadilly Press

Kyla, Rustus and Alethea live on Ramoa, in cities designed to keep the island's human inhabitants safe from the terrifying creatures in Beastlands. Kyla is a trainee Skyrider from Sophiatown. Prickly and antisocial, her one friend is Faro, her beloved pangron. She adores soaring through the sky on his back. She is devastated when he is stolen, and feels she has no choice but to journey into the Beastlands to rescue him. Rustus is a novice warrior from the elite Red district of Ataria. He is desperate to win his father's approval and for that he must conquer his hatred of hunting and killing and excel in the all-important initiation ceremony. He is leading the field until an act of kindness costs him his place and is banished to the Beastlands. Alethea is a young healer in the impoverished Blue district of Ataria. Her father, from whom she learnt all her skills, has died of the Scourge, a terrifying disease that is taking hold on the island. Now Alethea's grandmother has contracted it too. Alethea must find a cure, to save her and everyone else. If there's a plant that might be effective, it can only be in the Beastlands.

The three come across each other and before long they realise that their sole chance of survival against appalling dangers lies in combining their knowledge and ideas, and in trusting each other. The odds are against them, and not just from horrifying beasts. Someone is tampering with nature, and the consequences look deadly.

Beastlands: Race to Frostfall Mountain is a thrilling roller-coaster that will enthral middle-grade fantasy lovers, and quite possibly convert some readers who haven't yet felt the appeal of the genre. The island setting is excitingly brought to life. Even the plants are vividly described, and the creatures are wonderful works of imagination. Jess French is a zoologist, naturalist, vet, children's author, and broadcaster. She puts her expertise to very good use here. The protagonists are interesting and convincing, with their very different characters and their varying experiences and perspectives, provided in alternating chapters. The book has a powerful environmental message. It strongly hints at the need to question perceived wisdom and to collaborate to create change. Friendship, kindness and courage are key themes.

Anne Harding

Bronte Tempestra and the Lightning Steeds

Bex Hogan, illus. Hannah McCaffery, pub. Piccadilly

Bronte Tempestra and the Lightning Steeds is the first book in the exciting new series written by Bex Hogan. It features brave, feisty Bronte Tempestra, a princess of Storm Kingdom, one of the many kingdoms of Everdale.

Bronte has always been determined that she has what it takes to be a knight, but she has one problem: St Sebastian's School for Squires only accepts boys. This is why, when the school decides to admit female students for the first time, Bronte is thrilled. However, she soon learns that the school isn't what she imagined it to be. The knights aren't at all interested in going on quests and, even when trouble arises in Everdale, the staff don't seem to be aware of what's going on around them. It's up to Bronte and her new friend Tonkins to save the realm of education...but can they do it before it's too late?

The book starts with a map of Everdale, featuring the Crystal Kingdoms, Weather Kingdoms, Floral Kingdoms, Elemental Kingdoms, and the mysterious Forgotten Kingdoms, followed by a drawing of St Sebastian's School for Squires. There are entertaining, black and white illustrations like that on almost every page to break up the text. The vocabulary used in this book is fun and imaginative, like the acronyms POOP and SICK, and the names of unique creatures -- Cloud-Stealing Gnomes, Horrorflies, and Zombits. The brightly coloured cover and well-drawn maps are similar to the Rainbow Grey series, so those who enjoyed that series are bound to enjoy Bronte's adventure.

If you enjoy books with adventure, strong characters, and a touch of humour, then this book is for you. I would recommend this book for 7–9-year-olds.

Mya Grant (age 11)

Diamond Jack: Your Magic or Your Life

Anna Rainbow, pub. Chicken House

When Bram finds a mask hidden in his grandfather's garden shed, and feels compelled to wear it, she is magically transformed into Diamond Jack, a notorious Robin-Hood-style highway man, who mysteriously disappeared a year before.

There is little time for Bram to recover from the surprise, as the unsavoury Ripper Gang abducts her grandfather, believing he knows Diamond Jack's whereabouts. Bram decides to use the power of the mask to save her grandfather, who she believes to be the real Diamond Jack. Followed by her friend Ernest and in the company of Diamond Jack's Brigands, Bram is catapulted into a world of dangerous villains and holds-up. It becomes clear to Bram that the events surrounding her grandfather's abduction are linked to a conspiracy orchestrated by the Princess Regent Lavinia to remove her sister Princess Georgina from the throne. Surprised by further revelations about Diamond Jack's identity

and her family's connections to the famous highwayman, Bram sets on a rollercoaster adventure to save her grandfather and the kingdom.

Mixing elements of magic and high-stakes adventure with a modern and inclusive approach, Anna Rainbow delivers a thrilling story peppered with abundant twists and sparkling dialogue. Bram initially appears as the unlikely hero, lacking the skills to cut it as a brigand and doubting her ability to succeed in her quest constantly. Yet, as the story evolves Bram's understanding of the magic that operates within the mask and the discovery of her family secrets allow her to grow in confidence and to appreciate the fundamental notion that, more than magic, love and unity have power. Family relationships, loss, and complex sibling relationships feature as well as a positive message about embracing oneself. Although this story is resolved, the ending is left open to further thrilling adventures, which I hope will follow. With a nod to Dumas, as well as folk and fairy tales, this first book is a great addition to any junior school or home library.

Laura Brill

Marnie Midnight and the Moon Mystery

Laura Ellen Anderson, pub. Farshore

Meet a brand-new heroine; meet her family and friends; meet a rebellious rat and a terrifying bird. Discover the first book in a brand-new series. This is Marnie Midnight and she comes straight from the imaginatively creative mind of Laura Ellen Anderson. In book 1, *Marnie Midnight and the Moon Mystery* - book 2 is promised to follow in August with book 3 coming in January 2025 - we are about to be transported into a new world, taken to a new school and given an adventure beyond our wildest dreams.

Marnie is a moth, more importantly she is the first of the Midnight family siblings to metamorphose from a caterpillar to a moth. A great reader Marnie is excited to start at Minibeast Academy because this is where her heroine, Lunora Wingheart went to school. Lunora was a Moonologist who spent her life studying the mysteries of the ancient moths and their use of moon magic. But when she reaches the Academy Marnie can find no trace of moon studies and is given a detention for asking about it. It appears no one believes in moon magic anymore. Marnie is determined to get to the bottom of this mystery and luckily for her she has made some minibeast friends, as brave and determined as she is.

Floyd Flombidium is 70% bee, 29% ladybird and 1% mystery: as soon as you set your eyes on the illustrations it will become clear how he looks. More importantly however is his fashion sense and wide-ranging knowledge, both of which are going to prove very helpful in the days to come. Star Vonstrosity is the next Ant in line to succeed Queen Vaneria Vonstorcity and whilst she may believe in only vengeance there is more to this tiny ant than meets the eye. Together these three unlikely but very soon best of friends are going to find themselves thrust into an adventure that is as nail-biting as

it is hilarious. Laura Ellen Anderson has a way with words that may not always make sense to children but that older and adult readers will love, for this book knows no age boundaries. Its magic exudes from its pages and its gentle environmental themes wind through from page to page seamlessly. I read it in one sitting and can't wait to have a reread ahead of books 2 and 3!

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Marvin and the Book of Magic

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

There's always something great about a Jenny Pearson book. She manages to tackle serious subjects with humour and sensitivity and this book is no different. The subject she deals with in *Marvin and the Book of Magic* is embarrassment which every person reading this will have experienced at one time or another. Adults are old enough to understand what has happened and move on, but children aren't so lucky. Quite often they don't know what to say or how to act, books dealing with this subject are extremely useful.

After being humiliated by a badly behaved squirrel on national television, Marvin has vowed NEVER to perform magic in public again. But when he acquires a mysterious book that promises to show those with the gift of magic how to use it properly his best friend Asha persuades him to make a comeback in the school talent show. Get ready to discover if Marvellous Marvin will take to the stage and demonstrate the magic that can be found in true friendship.

Barrington Stoke books are amazing reads, short but complete stories accessible to all and Jenny Pearson makes sure her readers are rooting for Marvin as follow him and his efforts to overcome his embarrassment and continue doing the magic he loves. We get to know Marvin really well, learn about his family - his relationships with his father and grandfather - and his friendship with Asha. We are encouraged to care for them all.

As well as the excellent writing, the book is illustrated by Aleksei Bitskoff, whose pictures are a wonderful accompaniment to the writing and enhance several scenes. The first of these is the moment that Marvin and his squirrel cause chaos on TV, and it includes all the wonderful destruction the author describes whilst managing to get a couple of little jokes in too; look at the judges, one seems to be eerily familiar! Clive's Emporium is also another highlight illustration that showcases all the weird and wonderful things in the shop that younger readers will want to spend some time looking through. This is a truly wonderful story.

Helen Byles

The Minute Minders

Mary Murphy, pub. Pushkin Children's Books

Mary Murphy's *The Minute Minders* follows the adventures of a young girl called Stevie Clipper who is a fiddler. What's a fiddler? Well, a fiddler can't be seen by humans, yet they must spend their time trying to help people. Some fidders bring good luck, whilst others bring creative inspiration. Stevie's dad, however, is a truth finder, helping humans to find the truth, or at least he was until he was fired and had to become a minute minder. Being a minute minder is not an easy job, minute minders have just one minute to help humans overcome a problem. Unfortunately, Stevie's Dad is not good at following the rules and Stevie finds herself having to help him, something which is definitely NOT allowed! The two never give up and Stevie gets herself into some bother at times, but, when a little girl, Sandra May, needs help the two must work together to succeed and they are determined not to fail.

I'm not sure what I was expecting when I received this book and thought initially it may be a take on the classic *Borrowers* by Mary Norton. How wrong I was. This book is a gentle read which subtly tackles several themes including single parent families, bullying, kindness, love, and determination. A perfect read for children of around 8 plus, it is crammed with the most wonderful illustrations by the author which really help to bring the characters to life.

The first in a new series, *The Minute Minders* is a delightful, humorous story which is a must-read for any fans of Francesca Simon's *Horrid Henry* books and it would certainly make for an excellent class read.

Tracey Corner

My Brother Plato

George Myerson, pub. Andersen Press

George Myerson's *My Brother Plato* is an unusual book. He writes from the perspective of Potone, the elder sister of Plato and sets his story at a time when both of them were children. We see a typical sibling relationship and also find subtle hints at the philosopher Plato was to become. Potone is constantly frustrated by her younger brother's arguments and by the fact that although he dislikes writing and prefers verbal argument, she, who loves these things too, is not allowed to go to school in this ancient era of Athens.

Myerson also attempts to explain some of Plato's arguments including one that readers will love - his feet having the power to tell him whether they want to wear shoes on a particular day!

The book centres around two main incidents, one where the children's big brother, Demos, decides that their pet dog, Tigris, has injured him. According to Athenian Law at the time if a dog could be proven to have injured somebody, the person injured may take the dog away in a wooden collar and dispose of the animal. Potone and Plato decide to speak on behalf of Tigris at a trial presided over by Socrates. Can they win and bring harmony back to their family? Myerson has very cleverly woven some complex ideas into an accessible text for middle grade readers. This is something to be admired.

Rebecca Butler

The O.D.D. Squad: Rise of Invisidog

Stuart Heritage, illus. Vincent Batignole, pub. Puffin

My son has become a reluctant reader over the last couple of months. Then *The O.D.D Squad: Rise of Invisidog* arrived. It had been sent for me to review but just as quickly as it arrived it managed to disappear. It was only while I was putting something away that I found my son had hidden it! I had to explain to him that I needed it for a couple of days, to read and write a review of. This time his reluctance was not connected to reading but to letting me borrow my own book!

So, I finally met Invisidog and the adventure began. Justice City. Rain soaks its streets. Crime soaks it more. The fate of the entire city has been left in the hands (well, paws) of one brave superhero. That's right, it's INVISIDOG!

Invisidog hunts for danger wherever he can. There is no job too big, and no criminal too tough for the mighty Invisidog. He is the shadows! But we soon see that that's sort of where the problem lies. Because Invisidog's amazing superpowers are really rather rubbish. It turns out that being invisible isn't all that helpful when you're trying to rid a city of its terrible criminals. They tend to have a habit of ignoring you for one thing. So, it is time for Invisidog to think BIG. Can he convince the most amazing superheroes of all time - adorable-but-mighty Quack Attack, and the world's greatest thinker, Detective Octopus - to join forces?

This is such an awesome read. It's really funny and children are going to love it. The pages are brightly coloured and some of the text is in fun fonts – on pages are where expression is needed. This will be a great book to read out loud, the chapters are short which also makes this book ideal for children who are newly independent readers.

I hope there will be more in this series. As for my copy of the book it's disappeared again - but I'm just glad he's reading again.

Helen Byles

Pablo and Splash

Sheena Dempsey, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Pablo and Splash is the first book in a new series of graphic novels by the same name. It is all about time travelling penguins(!) and it is the first book that illustrator Sheena Dempsey has also authored. It grew out of a web-comic she created during the pandemic that featured herself and her husband as penguins!

Antarctic penguins Pablo and Splash are best friends but have very differing personalities. Pablo is a home bird, a sensible bird who likes to plan, whereas Splash is the complete opposite: impatient, adventurous, and desperate to explore the world. Splash somehow manages to persuade a reluctant Pablo that they should go away on holiday. But there is a problem with the idea - they have no means of transport. Thinking a little outside the box the pair decide to ask for help from the scientists based near their home. So begins an unexpected twist to their adventure. Far from the beach bars and luxury resorts that Splash's imagination had conjured up as being part of the holiday, the pair end up in a badly behaved time machine that whisks them back to the age of dinosaurs.

This wonderfully colourful graphic novel is full of humour and manages to be lightly educational too (ending with fact files about prehistoric earth). The addition of some how-to-draw guides and of course plenty of silliness such as penguin language and their constant jokes will ensure the popularity of the series with young readers.

Janet Ling

Peng and Spanners

Steve Webb, pub. Faber & Faber

Peng and Spanners is the first in a promising new series by Steve Webb and is a riotous whirlwind of superheroes, inventions – you are going to love the Ninja-Bots - and an obsession with all things pizza (it is even offered on the front cover as coming free with the book but make sure to read the small print!)

Fans of the graphic novel series *Dogman*, *Cat Kid* and *Bunny vs Monkey* will love this graphic novel with its similar and relatable format. It most certainly has an appeal to readers aged around 7-10 years, and, with its bright bold and easy to access text it is likely to engage even the most reluctant of readers.

Desperate for more pizza in his life, Peng the penguin presents a hilarious figure and one that children are quickly going to fall in love with! Peng comes to us armed with a wry sense of humour, he needs it

because he is bored of his life which is currently full of snow, ice and only fish to eat. Boring doesn't do it justice. To try and escape the boredom and have some fun he decides to ask his parents for adventures. What do they do? They send him to the aptly named Boredin School (this is just one of the many plays on words you'll find as you read this story, there are plenty of puns, thanks to Peng). It is at this new school that Peng meets Spanners, a smart and inventive feline with a toolbelt that goes everywhere with him... Once the pair have met, we know that we are guaranteed those adventures Peng wants so much and true to the story various adventures unfold giving us a tale that is anarchic in places, with a fast-paced narrative.

The illustrations are clean and original, bright, bold and incredibly expressive too. The text is funny, full of zippy and expressive dialogue. The book itself is beautifully produced with a reassuring weight and lovely glossy pages. This would make a lovely present for fans of fun graphic novels.

Stephanie Robertson

The Second-Hand Boy

Jennifer Lane, pub. Uclan publishing

Everything Billy owns is second-hand. Even the book *Tom's Midnight Garden*, a gift from his mother, is pre-owned: "This book is the property of James T." written on the inside cover. He starts reading, chuckling at James' scribbled comments. Billy is however very surprised when James materialises and becomes his new invisible friend.

And Billy desperately needs a friend. He is lonely at home, looking after his mum who on good days can light up the room, but on bad days struggles to get out of bed and get ready for work. His mum left his dad and there is no contact with him. Billy is lonely at school since his best (and only) friend Martyn left to travel around the world. Every day he sits next to Martyn's empty desk, and he is now prime target for the school bully, Archie. James, confident and care-free, could be the friend Billy needs at this moment.

Jennifer Lane cleverly parallels Billy's friendship with the invisible James with that of Lindsey, a girl at school, who shares Billy's passion for space. Readers will quickly identify Billy's true friend but have to continue reading as Billy makes poor decisions, spiralling downwards as he struggles to cope, becoming increasingly anxious, afraid he is going mad. There are however many supportive adult characters in the story. Billy's teachers care about him, and Mrs Simmons invites Billy to Space Club, creating a safe place for him in school. Mr Clarke, his English teacher, pays a house visit, although this worries Billy. Billy's mum has a network of friends, always looking out for them. Billy is not as isolated as he feels.

How did James materialise? The author never completely answers this question, suggesting James could be from a parallel universe or arises out of Billy's memory or imagination. Nevertheless, the character of James seems to become worryingly prophetic, intimating what is going to happen to Billy in the end. Engrossed in the story, I found myself willing Billy to resist James, to avoid a possible tragedy, and as it turns out, a repeat of history.

The Second-Hand Boy is a great read, inspiring hope and reassuring us that, regardless of our difficulties, there are always people willing to help.

Simon Barrett

Stitch

Pádraig Kenny, pub. Walker Books

I will confess that, never having been a huge fan of gothic horror, I was not entirely sure how I would find this latest offering from Pádraig Kenny. I will also confess that I had not read any of his previous work. However, something about the cover draws you in and I slipped nervously into the first chapter.

We meet Stitch upon his waking one morning when his first task is to use his chalk to mark his days of waking, '585 now', before feeding his pet Brown Mouse who lives in a cage in the corner. There was once another Mouse, but Stitch doesn't like to look at that cage. Stitch, who was brought to life by Professor Hardacre, believes his creator is resting and not to be disturbed. Luckily, there is still someone to talk to – Henry Oaf, another of Hardacre's creations. Sadly though, Henry is locked in a cage as he 'breaks things' and despite his pleading, Stitch will not open the cage, as that would mean breaking the Professor's orders. Henry's wonderful ability to make up words (quite splendiferous ones) makes him immediately endearing whilst Stitch's loyalty to his creator is equally so. Taking great care not to disturb the professor, Stitch spends the day alone before returning to his room in the evening.

There is a real air of loneliness and despite Stitch and Henry being 'monsters' made up of various parts before long you begin to feel for them. However, it's only when the chapter ends with Stitch's return to bed, and he marks just how long the professor has been resting, that your heart breaks for him. The sudden arrival of the Professor's nephew the following day throws Stitch and Henry's world into disarray. What follows is a heart-warming tale of friendship, courage, and kindness. It explores what it is to be different and what it means to be human. It is a Frankenstein-esque tale about the harm we can do by prejudging others based on their differences and the importance of embracing diversity.

For a relatively short novel *Stitch* packs so much in. Gruesome enough for fans of horror, a fully engaging plot filled with action and characters for whom you feel deeply. I am not ashamed to say I did shed a tear or two as I read.

A truly wonderful story for readers aged 9 upwards, *Stitch* will teach you to never judge a book by its genre!

Tracey Corner

Young Adult Books

A Fragile Enchantment

Allison Saft, pub. Orion Books

As a dressmaker with magic in her blood that allows her to create gowns that are the subject of talk from country to country, Niamh is renowned and sought after by many people for her talent.

When she receives a letter from the Royal family of Avaland requesting her skills to create the perfect wedding dress and suit for the prince's wedding, she cannot turn down the opportunity. She travels to Avaland, a place far from home. In a new country, in a palace where she knows no one, Niamh quickly finds herself drawn to Prince Kit and his cold, closed-off attitude. As the protests against the royals continue outside of the palace walls Niamh's friendship with Kit quickly blossoms into something more scandalous. At the same time tensions heighten within the court. Niamh finds herself exposed in an anonymous gossip column and she must choose between protecting Kit and his arranged marriage or a future for herself with Kit.

This book was an incredible read. Every page was filled with emotion, and it offers a storyline that is simply unforgettable. The chemistry between the main characters was beautiful and Niamh was an easily relatable main character; it was easy to imagine exploring new feelings and places with her inside the story. The plot flowed smoothly and was easy to follow, leaving me wanting to keep turning the pages and never put the book down. The world of the powerful and the royals was very well written so I could imagine it as I read along and not get confused between places or people.

I would recommend this book to anyone looking to read a story about a girl who gets tangled up in scandal and emotion in a new country while making forbidden friendships.

Gemma Walford

City of Spies

Iszi Lawrence, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

Iszi Lawrence has written several historical fiction books for children, this is her latest. A high action-adventure story set in New York during the American Revolution.

It is 1780, The American War of Independence is rampaging through the country, and Aiden Blaise a twelve-year-old boy is caught up in it all. Aiden is the nephew of a wealthy nobleman, his father failed to inherit this wealth as the younger son. Instead, he suffered poverty and destitution for an accident

of birth. In view of his plight Aiden's father decides to send his son to America to learn a profession with the printer James Rivington. Father and son are both unaware of the political implications surrounding this man.

Aiden, in contrast to his humble departure, hopes to return to England a confident and well-respected gentleman who has made his fortune. Memories of shame and worthlessness fuel his childhood recollections as a result of a fire where his princess cousin was rescued whilst he was left to perish. But unbeknown to Aiden at this stage in his life his moral conscience and strength of character determine a much more honourable path for him to follow. The story includes the Culper Spy Ring, Benedict Arnold, James Rivington and George Washington and will have young readers engrossed. Aiden, driven to gain acknowledgement of his self-worth by his illustrious family, initially follows the conventional route of staying loyal to the king. To the extent of being offered a medal for services rendered to the crown. But reality dawns as he begins to understand more about people's lives, the suffering that this can involve, and why the patriots are fighting for their cause. A fact he had failed to consider.

Adventure, secret codes, scenes from real life, and personal development are just a few of the themes presented in this book – that children drank weak beer not water to avoid water borne diseases; how books and papers were published; the acceptability of child labour; the slave trade and the plight of the prison ships. There is no better way to enjoy and learn about history than with a good book and one that is ideal for reluctant readers too.

Elizabeth Negus

Curious Tides

Pascale Lacelle, pub. Simon & Schuster Children's Books

What pique's your curiosity when you are looking for a new book to read? Does the age-old saying 'don't judge a book by its cover' cause you to look at everything but or do you consider cover, title, and blurb as well as author – have you heard of them, read other books by them? I find that, for me at least, it is all the above. I love to discover a new author, I am often intrigued by titles so I will read the blurb and then, usually if it is an author or perhaps a series I know, I will study the cover – I am usually looking for clues that will suggest to me what the design team have taken from the story and chosen to highlight.

Pascale Lacelle is not an author name I was familiar with before *Curious Tides* came to my attention and I soon discovered this is because this book is her debut and what a sparkling magnificent story she has woven! This is reflected (quite literally if you gently move the book) on the cover with its burst of silver, the hints of planets and then the blurb. The hints at a story that dips into the world of dark academia, has magical elements and dark secrets clinched the deal for me. But there is more for as the

title *Curious Tides* suggests this story will echo the ebb and flow of the treacherous seas, seas that are about to change the course of Emory's life. A student at the prestigious Aldryn College for Lunar Magic, one perilous night at the Dovermore sea caves leaves Emory believing her secrets have been drowned (along with her classmates) and discovering she has been left with a dark and strange magic.

Then the sea starts to wash the bodies ashore...

Emory turns to Baz for help. He is the brother of her now dead best friend and someone who is already experienced in the deadly nature of dark magic...he has his own. His is a rare, unpredictable, and beautiful Eclipse magic but it is danger of a Collapse, denying him all the abilities he has been blessed with. As Baz begins a quest to find out what happened to his sister, and Emory begins to investigate the secret-society she considers responsible for the deaths, an uneasy bond forms. But Emory's path soon becomes even more dangerous to her than a Collapse for she learns the society are thirsting not for power but for her... This quest that is not yet complete...

Louise Ellis-Barrett

The Eternal Ones

Namina Forna, pub. Usborne

The Eternal Ones is the thrilling finale to the ground-breaking *Gilded Ones* trilogy series by Namina Forna. It concludes the story which began in *The Gilded Ones* and continued in *The Merciless Ones*, the first and second novels respectively.

Deka discovers that the gods calling themselves the 'Gilded Ones' are in fact parasites, whose ravenous competition for power is destroying the world of Otera. She must now defeat them, but as she and her friends are led to the far reaches of the world as they know it, they discover an astonishing new realm - one which holds the key to Deka's past. Deka is then faced with a life-changing decision - be reborn as a god, and thus lose everyone she loves in the process, or bring about the end of the world. While there is a romance to be enjoyed in this novel, alongside the thrilling adventure, thankfully there is no urgency for it to blossom before the world - and the story - ends. This adds a sense of realism and allows readers to empathise with the characters and their situation.

The author's ability to tackle tough topics, topics that humanity has to face (such as diversity) in her latest novel is also commendable. These are issues which society has, in the past, sought to hide or ignore. With Forna's beautifully descriptive writing, particularly about places and characters, these issues blend perfectly into her narrative. And with such a vast array of secondary characters (some new, and some returning), Forna has made every effort in this finale, as in her previous instalments, to make sure readers can familiarise and associate themselves with each of the characters, and their distinct personalities. But she has also cleverly woven reminders of past events into the narrative of

The Eternal Ones, meaning it is not essential to have read the previous two novels in the series. That said, it is certainly recommended!

Helpfully, there is a recap section at the start of the book: The Story So Far, which means both new and returning readers will feel at home with the story. *The Eternal Ones* is a fast-paced narrative, but one that makes for a satisfying finale to the *Gilded Ones* trilogy.

Chris J Kenworthy

The Getaway List

Emma Lord, pub. Macmillan Children's Books

After graduating from high school with nothing but a McFlurry and a stack of rejection letters, from just about every college in America, Riley doesn't know what to do with her life. She has spent the last couple of years taking every extracurricular class going, and all without Tom by her side.

Tom, the ultimate bestie, and someone who is best known for being the nicest guy ever as well as for his bone crushing hugs, was dragged off to New York when his high-flying writer mum decided to relocate to the Big Apple. Riley and Tom have been doing their best to buckle down and get on with life since fate dealt them a rubbish card, but neither of them have succeeded very well - they are both flailing around trying to work out where they fit into the world, and they need each other. Cue Riley taking an epic road trip to NYC, a dreamy summer of friends, adventures, and far more sweets than a dentist would ever approve of! Along the way Riley and Tom make lifelong friends, learn things they never new about their besties, and face some hard truths about their futures and their pasts.

This book has everything you could ever wish for from a teen romance novel. A glamorous location that any reader will want to visit immediately - check! A whole host of characters that readers will fall in love with at first read - check! A swoon-worthy will-they-won't-they relationship that will have you struggling to put down this epic tale - check!

Whether a young adult planning your own summer extravaganza, or a fully-fledged adult wishing to return to the freedom of your teens, this book is sure to put a smile on your face.

Rosie Cammish Jones

Groosham Grange: The Graphic Novel

Anthony Horowitz, adapted by Maxe L'Hermerier, illus. Clément Lefèvre, pub. Walker Books

Creating a graphic novel requires a certain skill, adapting a prose book into a graphic novel takes almost even more skill because the person doing the adapting will want to stay as true to the original as they can and yet give the reader a brand-new experience of a story. Maxe L’Hermentier is the French screenwriter who has adapted the much-loved *Groosham Grange* by Anthony Horowitz into its graphic format. Illustrated by Clement Lefevre this graphic novel is both spooky and stylish and truly comes to life, jumping off the pages with the new, bold look this adaptation has given it.

In case you have not yet read the story it is a gothic page-turner... According to his school report David Eliot falls asleep in RE, has made little progress in maths and does no work in woodwork. It has become so bad that he has been expelled from school. His parents are worried what the neighbours will think and, just like that, David is sent to Groosham Grange. Groosham Grange is a boarding school located on a remote island. It is a place where strange and macabre things happen. David is welcomed there by the headmaster in person because he is as different as all those who are there, he is the seventh son of a seventh son – though he has no idea why his older siblings and six annoying aunts make any difference! After he has signed his name in the school register in blood, he soon learns that the creepy teachers, werewolves and vampires are just a few of the dark and disturbing elements that he is going to experience.

This adaptation weaves comedy and horror together in a brilliant and engaging way. It is ideal for readers around 8-12 years old and when we read it for this review, we loved the illustrations - they are haunting and beautiful, and full of atmosphere. The colour palette is rich yet subdued. The book is A4 size with lovely, thick pages with a tactile matte finish. Young fans of the arcane and supernatural will undoubtedly enjoy this book. Plus, there is promise that *Return to Groosham Grange: The Graphic Novel* will be coming soon...

Stephanie Robertson

In The Shallows

Tanya Byrne, pub. Hachette Children’s Books

YA books don’t come in small packages nowadays! Actually, they rarely did... *In The Shallows* comes in at 367 pages, and while it’s comforting to have a good solid book to read, sometimes I feel it might be an advantage to save some of the issues for a follow up. Having so said, on the flyleaf Tanya Byrne acknowledges the complexity of her latest novel, pointing out that it is likely that readers will have read elements of the story before, but ‘this one isn’t as simple’.

Byrne’s previous novels have been translated into several languages, certainly justified by her excellent writing, and the topics about which she writes – particularly those around teenage gender issues.

In the Shallows introduces us to Mara Malakar who is a quiet, sometimes shy and withdrawn fifteen-year-old girl. Together with her school friends she makes up a group of young people whose wider families encompass many different countries, cultures, and languages. This is a particularly admirable aspect of Byrne's book, with this variety of backgrounds and gender identities accurately, carefully, and inclusively portrayed. Mara has a best friend, Michelle, and they have been next-door-neighbour friends quite literally since they were born. Byrne uses Michelle very subtly as friend and adviser to Mara, especially when Mara is uncertain of her own wishes and loves. When Mara meets Nico she realises that she is attracted to her, but whilst it is clear Nico has similar feelings for Mara, Byrne describes their tentative relationship as 'maddening purgatory'. When Nico suffers a severe fall, apparently on the beach and loses her memory completely, Mara hopes to bring her memory back, to renew and extend their tentative love, but Nico's mother is very reluctant to allow Mara (or anyone) to visit or try to help recover Nico's memory, and indeed Nico becomes increasingly withdrawn and unwell.

Byrne's carefully revealed hints as to what has actually happened to Nico are delivered like a supremely thought through detective novel, but with the intensity of a seriously eloquent and thoughtful writer. While readers must surely hope for a sequel, could anything now surpass the depth of thought and honesty Tanya Byrne has demonstrated in this novel?

Bridget Carrington

Infinity Alchemist

Kacen Callender, pub. Faber Children's

Ash is devoted to the science of magic. His curiosity carries him into solitary hours spent learning, imagining the possibilities of practising much higher levels of alchemy. Such practise is forbidden without an alchemist's licence and Ash's attempts to earn one have been thwarted three times. Only elitist tuition can secure success in the licence exam, and with Ash's applications to Lancaster College rejected, his own self-study has not been enough. Instead, he keeps his job as the college groundskeeper's assistant, mingling small acts of alchemy with caring for the plants that he grows - and carefully avoiding the cruelty of the arrogant students that surround him.

But one encounter seems to shift Ash's pathway entirely: Ramsay Thorne, a feared graduate apprentice, offers to create an unexpected alliance. Ramsay is unpredictable and infuriating, but her proposition brings Ash a genuine chance to fulfil his ambitions. He and Ramsay begin night-time meetings in The Giddings Library, separated only by the lamp between their chairs. Together they pursue the Book of Source: a long-ago legend from childhood stories, thought to bestow its holder with the most immense alchemical abilities. It is a book, Ash learns, that may in fact exist after all. But competing for its discovery may be very dangerous indeed.

Ramsay and Ash are an intriguing pairing, who seem to clash and yet connect with a strange strength. Ramsay shifts genders, their energy settling and resettling beyond fixed binaries, and she grapples with the weight of a troubling family history. Ash is trans and is a warm main character whose determination and longing feel immediately vivid. Although the alliance between Ramsay and Ash is a risk, alchemy is what Ash loves - without it he does not feel himself. When he stands alongside Ramsay, great possibilities soon unfurl...

Jemima Breeds

On Silver Tides

Sylvia Bishop, pub. Andersen Press

Sylvia Bishop has been writing stories on and off all her life and has 10 published books. In *On Silver Tides*, her latest, we find a fantasy novel interwoven with folklore and allegorical undertones that will appeal to a wide audience aged twelve and up.

The content of the book is orchestrated by a recurring section entitled "The Waterways: Essays on a Hidden World." These essays include Microbiology, Zoology, Botany, Ecology, Sociology, Governance, Wetland Ecology, Defensive Arts and Weaponry and more. The extracts that we are given under each of these headings help us to comprehend more about a certain clandestine amphibious community. This is the community of the Silvermen who live alongside the homo sapiens or Landmen. Due to the contamination of the waterways the Silvermen live in, by the Landmen, saltwater from the sea is slowly infiltrating the rivers all over the British Isles, driving the Silvermen further and further inland.

As they fight to find sufficient space for each of their communities to live in, we realise that their existence will soon be compromised making their, until now, peaceful co-existence problematical. The essays that guide us through the story were written by a Silverman: Firth Pade, in an attempt to both clarify and raise awareness of the situation facing these two communities. We soon realise that theirs is a familiar predicament to our own - with climate warming and mass migration. Firth's message to anyone who reads his essays is to keep relationships cordial, improve your treatment of the environment and encourage everyone can be guaranteed at least the chance of survival.

Written with expansive imagination *On Silver Tides* is an eloquent treat of a book. Its complexity adds to a scintillating plot with a loving home top of the agenda. A gem.

Elizabeth Negus

The Scarlet Veil

Shelby Mahurin, pub. Electric Monkey

A love for Vampire romance, for Vampiric stories has, I now believe, been a part of me for many years and has, like many vampires, lain dormant, not finding any stories to ignite the passion that I had once known, when I read Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*. She converted me, after all when university students, my now husband and I once found ourselves unconsciously moving from the edge of the bed we used as a settee, right into a safe corner when watching Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*! It was scary. Then I read *The Historian* and now I am a firm fan of Vampire stories and I have a soft spot for vampire romances!

Set in the world she created and has built in her *Serpent and Dove* series, Shelby Mahurin sets *The Scarlet Veil* six months after Célie has taken her sacred vows and joined the Chasseurs. Don't worry if you are not familiar with this world, this story takes a new strand and soon immerses you in its characters and places. Célie is the first huntswoman in the Chasseurs whose captain is her fiancée. But not everyone welcomes her into the ranks and even her fiancée is keeping secrets from her, secrets about bodies and despite her determination to help keep Belterra safe she is kept secluded away from danger. Even more so after a night-time visit to her sister's grave results in her discovery of a dead woman with two unusual puncture wounds in her neck and the presence of a man who seems to be there and then isn't... With a silver cross she has taken from the woman's body she seems to be protect, until she isn't... Another night-time outing, one just a few steps from home, sees her knocked out, kidnapped, and taken as bait to the isle where she must await All Hallows Eve and her fate. Célie is not going wait meekly though, she is determined to get to the bottom of the mystery and save her friends. Will a talking cat, annoying ghosts and a pair of potentially friendly vampires be enough to help her, or will she succumb to the darkness luring her in?

This is a magnificently woven story, a romance, a horror story, an age-old tale of a girl who strives to be more, who tries to fight against the norm's society is dictating and hopes to save herself, her friends, hopes to do the right thing but discovers more layers of lies and deceit from them than from her supposed enemies.

Just like the vampire drawn to the scent of human blood, you will find yourself drawn to this dark, gothic, evocative tale and, like me, you may – once you have finished it – go on to explore the other parts of this world in *the Serpent and Dove* series.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

That Self-Same Metal

Brittany N. Williams, pub. Faber Children's

It's always pleasing to know that the book you've just heartily enjoyed reading is the first in a saga, with the promise of more excitement to come. *That Self-Same Metal* (the book in question) is to be

followed with the ongoing story of young people in early seventeenth-century London who are members of the King's Men. The King's Men of course were the troop which included William Shakespeare and Richard Burbage, and readers learn (in considerable carefully researched detail) what a backstage Shakespearian life was like.

This is NOT a boring history lesson! Instead, it uses an accurate and interesting historically accurate background to draw readers into London life 1605. But is that all? No, of course it's not. Brittany N. Williams has woven a fantasy into Shakespeare's world which is based on the beliefs of Elizabethan and Stuart people of England, which included many people and creatures we now regard as fantasy creations, from friendly, helpful spirits and fairy people to shape-shifting, violent horrors.

Sixteen-year-old Joan is part of the backstage Globe crew, and one of the many Black people whose families have been taken from their own countries, largely to serve as curiosities and servants to those higher up the social ladder. As Williams explains in a careful and interesting 'note on history', Joan's family are originally from West Africa, and their Yoruba background is reflected in the religion of Orisha which Williams elaborates to fit the adventures of her characters. Joan and her family have been given special supernatural powers by the Orisha, and as a result she has an incredible ability to control metal. As the backstage worker who is employed to maintain the swords needed in Shakespeare's plays, Joan's power to control metal is essential.

In this first novel in *the Forge and Fracture* series, Joan, her family, friends, and the rest of London, face the Fae, who usually co-exist peacefully with them, and who have a special pact with the Orisha. When the pact is broken, great danger faces the King's Men, and the King and Queen themselves. Readers meet many carefully researched historical characters and we await the outcome of Joan's increasingly complex love life!

Bridget Carrington

What the River Knows

Isabel Ibañez, pub. Hodderscape

What is it that river knows and why should a river be so knowledgeable that it takes a starring role in the title of this YA fantasy? I was curious when I saw that Isabel Ibañez had a new book *What the River Knows* and read that it was described as *The Mummy* meets *Death on the Nile*... It had my Egyptologist curiosity piqued and I was not disappointed...

Inez Olivera lives in and belongs to the glittering upper class society of Buenos Aires. It is the late nineteenth century and Bolivian-Argentinian Inez lives with her aunt and cousins but at almost nineteen she is not above hiding with her sketchbook. When we first meet her, she is in the old porcelain bathtub whose dwindling magic still provides enough cover to ensure that it is difficult to

spot her. She is hiding away with her sketchbook waiting until the time that day when a long hoped for letter from her parents will hopefully arrive. Her aunt may not approve, of Inez drawing, of her behaviour or of her parents but she still loves and cares for Inez. The disapproval of Inez's parents, her brother and sister-in-law, comes from their being Egyptologists who, at the earliest opportunity left Inez with her aunt and spent as much time as they could in Egypt. Despite her imploring Inez was never allowed to go with them and now...now she learns they are dead and the mysterious ring her father sent her is luring her to Egypt, its magic a strong, irresistible pull.

This is a story of old-world magic which has been mostly left behind by many, but which Inez can feel in her very soul, and which becomes stronger once she sets foot in Egypt, having run away from home. She is determined to find her uncle and unravel the mystery or should that be mysteries surrounding her parents. Despite her uncle's best efforts to send her home Inez uses her wiles as well as her magic to slip past the infuriating handsome bodyguard her uncle has assigned her. Unsure who she can trust, who she should trust, and how she is going to find the answers she longs for Inez is a strong heroine who is about to lead us into an adventure like no other. This is ancient Egypt, 19th century Egypt. Ancient magic. Murder. Mystery and a rivals-to-lovers romance that will have you biting your nails, perched on the edge of your seat and swooning all at the same time! It is a page-turner and yes, it does end on a cliff-hanger because this is the first title in a duology, and I have no idea whodunnit or why...

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Non-Fiction Books

A Really Short Journey Through the Body

Bill Bryson, adapted Emma Young, illus. Daniel Long, Dawn Cooper, Jesús Sotés, Katie Ponder, pub. Penguin Books

A Really Short Journey Through the Body is a most attractive, large format book. Bill Bryson is a highly successful author, and he brings his flair to this exciting volume and topic. In his introduction he tells his readers “No doubt about it, the human body is a truly remarkable thing. In this book I hope to tell you a bit more about what makes it so amazing, as we marvel at the wondrous invention that is you.”

He then takes us on a top to toe tour of our bodies pointing out fascinating facts along the way. The format is varied and with plenty of illustration to accompany his words: this maintains the reader’s interest. We meet all the body parts, cells, and DNA, and look at today’s enemies, allergies, ageing, and death. The style is engaging and age appropriate with good use of colour and attractive illustration.

The book is full of facts. Did you know that your eyes blink 14,000 times a day, which is a total of 23 minutes of the time that you are awake each day? Or that a pair of lungs, smoothed out, would cover a tennis court? Or that it takes 100 muscles to stand up? Or that we swallow about 2,000 times a day? Or that the heart and brain each burn about 400 calories a day? Bryson also includes fascinating stories such as Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s trick that went wrong, Alexis St Martin’s stomach and Samuel Pepys’ bladder stone.

At the end of the book Bryson reminds us of the many aspects of the body that we do not fully comprehend and points us towards further research. Supported by a comprehensive index this is a superb volume for readers aged 9+ – engaging, informative and inspirational. Bravo!

Brenda Marshall

The Code of Life

Carla Häfner, Mieke Scheier, pub. Flying Eye Books

The Code of Life takes us to the beginnings of its story in 1856 where, in an abbey in Austria, a monk called Gregor Mendel worked for years to unlock the secret of genetics. However, it wasn’t until 40 years later that people realized the significance of his experiments and observations. Moving on we

explore the works of Flemming and Boveri, both German scientists, as well as US biologist, Morgan, until we reach the discovery of DNA.

The Code of Life clearly and succinctly explains the history of genetics, genetic theory, and how this helps to understand what living things are made from. Darwin's theory of evolution and its role in diversity is described as is the concept of nature verse nurture via environmental influences and there is a fantastic visual explanation of blended families and the genes they all share. The book concludes with a look at the Human Genome Project, genetic engineering, and cloning as well as gene editing, environmental genetics, and stem cell research.

The Code of Life, written by Carla Häfner and Mieke Scheier, who are both genetic scientists, provides an extremely thorough journey through the history and present-day science of genetic research and engineering. It is aimed at 11–13-year-olds and has a comprehensive contents page and index. The illustrations are clear, adding to the understanding of the text which is divided into manageable segments. It would make a useful addition to the school library or be of interest to those with a fascination for genetics and heredity.

Barbara Band

Evolution

Sarah Darwin and Eva-Maria Sadowski, illus. Olga Baumert, pub. What On Earth Books

Evolution is a fascinating non-fiction book which takes the reader through the history of natural history. It explores the most significant discoveries made by scientists and how they have helped us to gain an understanding of what has been happening on planet Earth for millions of years.

Young readers will gain such a wonderful range of scientific knowledge from reading this book. Sarah Darwin and Eva-Maria Sadowski don't over-simplify the learning, so it is great for those with some biological knowledge and a lot of interest in natural science as well as those exploring this learning for the first time. For those readers interested in dinosaurs, there are a few double-page spreads which explore the most fearsome and impressive reptiles that lived on this planet before their mass extinction.

The pages of the book are engaging; the text is split into paragraphs, often numbered to show the chronology of events, and the illustrations are simply amazing. On each double-page spread there is a box celebrating 'Pioneering People' who have made significant contributions to the continuing development of knowledge on the topics that are being explored. A timeline, following through the book on the bottom of the pages, shows the chronology of different periods of history which helps to bring perspective to the length of each period and where they fit in the grand scheme of things. One of my favourite double-pages of the book is the one containing a world map at the end. It is fascinating

to see where different famous discoveries were made as well as the route that the HMS Beagle (with Darwin) took on its iconic exploration of the natural world between 1831 and 1836.

This really is a wonderful, engaging read which will answer those questions readers have about what evolution is, how it works and why it is so awesome!

Tom Joy

Forgotten Fairy Tales of Unlikely Heroes

Mary Sebag-Montefiore, pub. Usborne

Forgotten Fairy Tales of Unlikely Heroes is a very different collection of seven fairytales aimed at 7–11-year-olds. The stories have been collected from cultures around the world, including Norway, Estonia, Romania, India and Pakistan. Some of them even date back to the mythology of the Greeks and Romans. How are they different to other fairytales though? Many famous and well-known fairytales feature heroines and heroes who are portrayed as beautiful princesses and handsome princes. But in this collection of tales the heroes are ordinary characters who are often quite insignificant. They are very young, or poor and perhaps unable to speak up for themselves. These heroes show us that simple determination and bravery can often win the day.

It is because the characters are different to those we would usually expect to find that makes this selection of tales well worth reading. The mixture of ordinary and magical is fascinating. There is Kate, an ordinary farm girl who manages to outwit an ogre. Then a young boy who is raised by a family of eagles. An old man wins fame for his kindness. A girl discovers that what makes her different also makes her special. There is a princess who rides a goat whilst waving a spoon. Other tales feature a witch and an orphan. Overall, a remarkable collection of characters and adventures.

This fascinating and lovely collection of fairytales is beautifully illustrated throughout. It is a fun read for young children alone or with an adult. It is all the more special because the heroes are different and unusual, even if the plots may feel familiar.

Gary Kenworthy

From Cells to Ourselves: The Story of Evolution

Gill Arbuthnott, illus. Christopher Nielsen, pub. Big Picture Press

The title of this book, *The Story of Evolution*, is slightly misleading because it doesn't just look at evolution but starts with 'In the Beginning,' exploring the Big Bang theory and looking at how old the

Earth is and how it was formed and finishes with the 'Human Age', where you can find out about our closest relatives and the ascent of early man.

Each chapter considers various historical theories and early ideas linked to the topic under investigation showing how scientific concepts impacted on what people thought and believed. Readers can discover how life began, examine the fabulous world of fossils, meet renowned dinosaur detectives and there's an interesting double-page panorama with a timeline of dinosaurs. The end of the dinosaurs and extinctions are described before we encounter Darwin and the Voyage of the Beagle with the theory of evolution, natural selection and variation explained using supporting evidence.

The matt pages and muted colours as well as the style of illustrations give the book an almost vintage feel. Information is in manageable portions and there are drawings, diagrams, and maps galore with several sections use a graphic novel format to explain the text. There's no index but the contents page is detailed enough to find what you're looking for. Aimed at ages 7–11 years this book will delight any budding palaeontologist as well as being a useful addition to both classroom collections and school libraries.

Barbara Band

Healthy Mind, Happy You: How to Take Care of Your Mental Health **Dr Emily MacDonagh, illus. Josefina Preumayr and Ana Sebastián, pub. Scholastic**

Ah! I wish I had this book in my younger years! *Healthy Mind, Happy You* written by an NHS doctor and Health and parenting columnist, is a wholesome handbook on manoeuvring our emotions through development of emotional intelligence and by becoming aware of the happenings around and within us. It is a life guide written by a professional working in the field of mind, psyche and emotions and talks about hormonal health, self-care, therapy, depression, anxiety, and dealing with difficult feelings. It goes deep enough for one to easily comprehend the importance of a healthy nervous system, gut, and brain. Readers get to learn that they are not alone, and support is readily available.

Full of explanatory diagrams, health-oriented questionnaires, resources, tips and tricks to understand the human mind and body better. These exercises in the book are profoundly grounding and help readers manage life well with honest and pertinent information like this one on anger-

“Just like when we feel sad or worried, feeling angry can also come with feelings in our body. Here are a few examples: Feeling your muscles tense up. Feeling restless or fidgety or like you can't stay still. Feeling your breathing or heart rate increase, sometimes you might feel as though you can hear your heart beating in your ears!”

As the reader continues, they experience the book as if they are in for a therapeutic session. It can be a great gift for kids aged 11 and above to help them understand and heal well through what life is going to bring in at times. However, it's not limited to that, anyone going through tough times and incorrigible emotional chaos can use this to begin a healing journey before getting into therapy of any kind. Closing this with some wise words by Dr Emily - "There is no right or wrong way to look, think or feel, and the more we understand and accept the differences between us and others, the more our world will be a better and happier place!"

Ishika Tiwari

**How To Say No To Your Phone: An Empowering Guide For Young People
Brad Marshall, Lindsay Hassock, illus. Lauriane Bohémier, pub. Magic Cat Publishing**

This book feels particularly important for young people in today's society. Technology has become a huge part of our lives, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a healthy balance between connecting with people face-to-face and enjoying time on your phone. *How to Say No to Your Phone* provides a brilliant insight into how your phone usage may be impacting your life and prompts you to reflect on how to improve your relationship with your device.

The book explains ten manageable steps which you can take to control your screen time. The steps include useful ways to approach the time you spend on your phone such as building new habits and making space for other hobbies. They also include some very reflective steps that can be taken which can help you reassess your relationship with your phone, how you manage your online and offline relationships and whether you are stuck in a cycle of doom! With a clear purpose of improving your phone usage and ensuring that your mental health is not impacted negatively by the relationship you have with your phone (and other devices for that matter), this book feels important for all members of the family and will open up some really beneficial discussions around the dinner table.

Written by psychologists who are clearly very passionate and knowledgeable about the subject, this book is informative and backed up with science. The tips and key messages are delivered in a very clear way and the illustrations and mindfulness messages are superb.

Tom Joy

**Inside Story: How the News Works
Jane Marlow, illus. Terri Po, pub. Templar Books**

How The News Works is a jam-packed information book covering all aspects of creating and presenting the news. Readers can find out what is meant by news and how to identify news you can

trust and fake news (both important topics in today's environment); the history of the news and how it reached the public in past times; and important news items that shaped the world.

There are sections on who's who in the news process, a glimpse into the newsroom and "a day in the life of a reporter" with expert tips from Charlene Walker of ITV News – great for those interested in reporting or journalism. Different types of news are covered such as sports news, entertainment news, foreign news, and investigative journalism. There's also a section covering online news looking at digital platforms and social media plus discussion of citizen journalism, something that is on the rise and available to everyone with a Smart phone.

Although aimed at ages 8 – 12 years (KS2), older students (KS3) would also find the book interesting. The format is very visual with lots of cartoon-style illustrations. The matt pages are quite full and busy but information in accessible chunks. With practical tips, quizzes, activities, and a glossary this book would be an excellent addition to the school library, lending itself to browsing as well as appealing to those with career aspirations in the media.

Barbara Band

Little Dinosaurs, Big Feelings

Swapna Haddow, Dr Diplo, illus. Yiting Lee, pub. Magic Cat Publishing

Little Dinosaurs, Big Feelings is a delightful book written by a certain Doctor Diplo with a little help from Swapma Haddow.

Dr Diplo was a much-loved therapist in the Jurassic age, but that is as an adult, when he was young he worried about lots of things. He found that he could cope with all the worries which sometimes tried to overwhelm him by doing activities such as yoga, mindfulness, exercise and talking about his feelings. Finding that all these things worked for him he decided to open his cave to all the dinosaurs in his neighbourhood and share what he had learnt. Now it is time for him to introduce us to his Jurassic friends - Steggie the Angry Dinosaur; Rex the Scared Dinosaur; Bruno the Sad Dinosaur; Minka the Happy Dinosaur; Poppy the Lonely Dinosaur; Percy the Shy Dinosaur; Terrie the Excited Dinosaur; Trev the Overwhelmed Dinosaur; Iggy the Bored Dinosaur; Nino the Content Dinosaur. See how they have all been given, rather cleverly, names linked to emotions, helping children relate to them.

The dinosaurs share their stories, and we learn how Dr Diplo can help them with their "tricky emotions." The book is presented in cartoon format and the appealing illustrations have been given charming touches such as Doctor Diplo's glasses. The stories are perfect for reading and offer opportunities for children to open up about their feelings and problems. Doctor Diplo is approachable, gentle, and wise. Each chapter ends with a summary about the key emotion, advice,

psychological strategies, breathing exercises, mindfulness and positive visualisation. I particularly like the idea of the 'Friend in the Mirror' and Doctor Diplo's Golden Link Recap which I reproduce in full because it encapsulates the tone and appropriate language that is a key to the book's success –

- 1 Take a deep breath in and out.
2. Focus on your heart.
3. Imagine a golden string linking you to those who you love.
4. The string helps you close even when you are apart.
5. Breathe in and out again.
6. Remember you are always connected to the ones you love.

At the end of the book there is a 'Dino-Sized Note to Carers' in which the author explains that he envisaged the book as "a toolkit for children to grow into emotionally resilient individuals to reinforce the importance of help-seeking behaviours and normalise talking therapy – and hugs!" Highly recommended for children aged 5+ and their adults.

Brenda Marshall

Roman Soldiers: Discover the world of the ancient Roman army

Tegen Evans, illus. Tom Froese, pub. Nosy Crow

Roman Soldiers is a beautiful book published by Nosy Crow in collaboration with the British Museum, their latest collaboration, and is a brilliant exploration of the life of a Roman soldier. The book is only twenty-five pages long, excluding the glossary, organized in double spreads, each focusing on a particular topic, and offers an accessible and engaging overview.

The organization of the legions, the requirements to become part of the formidable machine that was the Roman army, the training given to the soldiers, the weapons they used and the tactics they devised which made them so successful, are all explained in clear paragraphs and accompanied by illustrations full of fun and character. Life in the army camp and on the move is described and is able to provide some of the smaller details about being a Roman soldier that bring readers closer the reality of that military life. The formidable level of discipline that ensured the effectiveness of the operations, for example, is detailed in the list of punishments soldiers faced if they did not discharge their duties as expected. I don't think it is a life many of us would have wanted!

This book appears on the market just as an excellent exhibition at the British Museum focuses on the life of the Roman legionaries. This book would be a great preparation tool for those lucky enough to be planning to visit the exhibition, or a follow-up for those lucky younger visitors doing project work at school or home. Equally, it is an excellent source of information to support the history syllabus at primary level, and a resource that will be in great demand in any children's library.

Laura Brill

STEMville: The Bee Connection

Ben Newman, pub. Flying Eye Books

Mason B Chandler is a street-savvy solitary bee and proprietor of Mason B Chandler Private Detective Agency, the newest business in Stemville Town. When a golden, oozy substance brings Bug Borough to a sticky standstill Mason B proves to be just the bee for the case, picking up clues and piecing together information from the wider Bee community. The reader follows her investigation closely, learning all about the different types of bees, where they live, how they communicate and just why we need them in our world.

The Bee Connection is an inventive, intriguing, and ingenious combination of fact and fiction which is hugely good fun. From the detailed endpapers and first introduction to Stemville, the reader is encouraged to look closely for details and build up their bee knowledge as Mason B collects up clues to solve her case. As you'd expect from Flying Eye Books, the production is exceptional, and this feels like a very special book. The illustrations are bright and bold, stylish, and ever so slightly retro. The information is superbly presented; uncluttered, clearly captioned, with diagrams and explanatory panels, making it easily digestible and never overwhelming or dumbed down. This is a book children will come back to again and again, drawn in by the illustrations, fascinated by the facts, and always finding some new learning. It would make the perfect present for nature lovers as well as for fans of the brilliant *Professor Astro Cat* series (also by Ben Newman).

The Bee Connection is a must for every primary school library and KS2 classroom bookshelf. Teachers will find it an engaging and effective resource for supporting science topics as well as literacy and art. It is a book which will more than earn its place on any good school reading spine. The final spread of 'how to bee friendly' tips is inspiring, and the projects would work equally well at school or at home. *The Bee Connection* is the first in a brand new, narrative nonfiction STEM series, STEMville. The next, focusing on forces, is due in 2025. Hopefully, it will be followed by many others too!

Eileen Armstrong

The Universal Guide to the Night Sky

Lisa Harvey-Smith, illus. Sophie Beers, pub. Thames & Hudson

Lisa Harvey-Smith's *The Universal Guide to the Night Sky* is a practical guide to exploring the night sky. She orientates the reader first through the constellations; the planets; the Earth's only natural

satellite: the moon; and finally, our own star, the Sun. In addition, *The Universal Guide* advises, in simple steps, how to make use of all this information to begin stargazing.

Lisa Harvey-Smith is a skilful communicator, a regular contributor to popular space programmes and author of numerous books, including children's books on space. She writes in an accessible, personable tone, making good use of witty sub-headings to engage readers of *The Universal Guide*. Fun facts pepper the pages, creating layers of information, engaging readers with different interests and reading levels. Moreover, at the back of the book, there are additional notes for curious readers who would like to do some extra research. The format of the book means sections of text are short, decorated by Sophie Beer's illustrations. Whilst there is a glossary defining some technical terms, most words are explained simply and succinctly in the text, making it much easier to understand.

In addition, *The Universal Guide* is a handy size, relatively compact - one hundred and forty-four numbered pages – and available in a softcover, making it more durable than a typical paperback. It is ideal for carrying around in a backpack and thumbing through whilst stargazing, double checking observations and re-reading instructions. Moreover, the chapter headings and sub-headings means it is straight forward to find information quickly without needing to use the index.

Inevitably there is a chapter on skygazing equipment – but not until chapter four - and we should take inspiration from the author's own childhood story of using a second-hand pair of binoculars. Binoculars have the advantage of not being too expensive, being portable and easy to store, making them ideal for beginners. There is advice on how to use smartphones to take photographs and suggestions for different applications to download and use to explore the stars. Lisa Harvey-Smith even gives us a top tip - the best telescope to buy is the one you will use the most!

Lisa Harvey-Smith's *The Universal Guide to the Night Sky* will enthuse every reader to take up stargazing and encourages all of us to make it a daily habit.

Simon Barrett

Picture books

A Horse Called Now

Ruth Doyle, illus. Alexandra Finkeldey

Alberta: A Cautionary Tale

Margaret Sturton

The Colour Monster: The Feelings Doctor and the Emotions Toolkit

Anna Llenas

Confetti: A colourful celebration of love and life

Dean Atta, illus. Alea Marley

Flying High

Cao Wenxuan, trans. Jake Hope and Simone-
Davina Monnelly, illus. Yu Rong

Meet the Wildlings

Gwen Millward

Misty Mole and the Big Switch-Off

Dr Yasmin El-Rouby, illus. Ischy Walters

Misty Mole and the Eating Adventure

Dr Yasmin El-Rouby, illus. Ischy Walters

Misty Mole Gets New Glasses

Dr Yasmin El-Rouby, illus. Ischy Walters

One Goose, Two Moose

Kael Tudor, illus. Nicola Slater

Once Upon A Storytime

Gareth Peter, illus. Natelle Quek

Please!

Simon Philip, illus. Nathan Reed

Vile Virginia and The Curse That Got Worse

Issy Emeney, illus. Chris Mould

Who Rules the Rockpool?

Matty Long, illus. Matty Long

Junior books

Beastlands: Race to Frostfall Mountain

Jess French

Bronte Tempestra and the Lightning Steeds

Bex Hogan, illus. Hannah McCaffery

Diamond Jack: Your Magic or Your Life

Anna Rainbow

Marnie Midnight and the Moon Mystery

Laura Ellen Anderson

Marvin and the Book of Magic

Jenny Pearson, illus. Aleksei Bitskoff

The Minute Minders

Mary Murphy

My Brother Plato

George Myerson

The O.D.D. Squad: Rise of Invisidog

Stuart Heritage, illus. Vincent Batignole

Pablo and Splash

Sheena Dempsey

Peng and Spanners

Steve Webb

The Second-Hand Boy

Jennifer Lane

Stitch

Pádriag Kenny

Young Adult books

A Fragile Enchantment

Allison Saft

City of Spies

Iszi Lawrence

Curious Tides

Pascale Lacelle

The Eternal Ones

Namina Forna

The Getaway List

Emma Lord

Groosham Grange: The Graphic Novel

Anthony Horowitz, adapted by Maxe

L'Hermerier, illus. Clément Lefèvre

In The Shallows

Tanya Byrne

Infinity Alchemist

Kacen Callender

On Silver Tides

Sylvia Bishop

The Scarlet Veil

Shelby Mahurin

That Self-Same Metal

Brittany N. Williams

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