



Armadillo

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

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Picture Book Reviews

A Bear Named Bjorn

Delphine Perret, pub. Gecko Press

A Bear Named Bjorn takes the reader into the forest with Bjorn the Bear and his friends, The Fox, The Weasel and The Badger. Included are six enchanting chapters, centered around Bjorn discovering new objects and activities - the familiarity of these human actions make for a very amusing read!

The delightful accounts of Bjorn's adventures allow the reader to escape into a world where nature and human 'nature' become one, which is guaranteed to capture a child's imagination. Bjorn is a thoughtful and eccentric bear, which we see when he shares his prize sofa with his friends, yet, his mischievous personality is also shown when himself and his friends borrow clothes from a washing line to dress up for their very own carnival! The importance of friendship is cleverly weaved into the book as the community all join to help Bjorn in his times of need.

The beautiful illustrations compliment the story wonderfully as the line drawings depict the personalities of the characters, whilst also aligning with the simplicity of the text. The frequent illustrations are perfect for a new reader! Originally written in French, the translation of short sentences and easy vocabulary make for an easy and relaxing read with a young reader also.

The subtle humour of The Owl's detailed medical examination and Bjorn's creative use of a fork will appeal to many and is guaranteed to bring a smile to both a child's and an adult's face!

Jemima Henderson

Alfred's Adventures in the Children's City

Imogen Alexander and Rose Feather, illus. Rose Feather, pub. Play and Picture Books

This engaging, unusual picture book was conceived as part of Play and Picture Books, a project delivered by Kettle's Yard Art Gallery in Cambridge and the Red Hen Project, through an Early Years initiative, Cambridgeshire County Council's 'Talking Together'.

This project funds work which helps parents to support young children's communication, literacy and language development. The charity Red Hen Project works one-to-one with children and families at home, at school and in the community. *Alfred's Adventure in the Children's City* focuses on the artwork and techniques of the naïf/self-taught early twentieth-century painter Alfred Wallis, over one

hundred of whose drawings and paintings now have a home in Kettle's Yard, the University of Cambridge's modern and contemporary art gallery.

The story follows the adventures of a real group of families who explored the paintings of Alfred Wallis, and whose adventures started at home in North Cambridge, and took them eventually to Kettle's Yard House and Gallery. Alfred Wallis was a sailor and fisherman who lived in Penzance, and who, at the age of seventy, took up drawing and painting to record the seas, boats, villages and seascapes he remembered from his travels. Having moved in his old age to nearby St Ives, he met artists such as Ben Nicholson, who admired his work and encouraged him.

The book imagines Alfred living in Kettle's Yard, being lonely, and taking his work into the city to entertain and engage children. His work appeals particularly to children because his images are simple and childlike, with no attempt at detailed accuracy or perspective, and his painting technique is immediate and simple. The text and images in this picture book reflect how the project's families discovered Wallis's artwork through stories, artmaking and songs, and through this built confidence in multi-sensory play and storytelling. Feather and Alexander follow the project's children's discoveries (which are of course Alfred's Adventures), which brought them new skills and understanding, and a great deal of fun. The book's story and images are simple, like Wallis's, using cut-and-stick techniques to reproduce the drawings which Feather made on the spot of the project's children. A wonderful book!

Bridget Carrington

The Blue Giant

Katie Cottle, pub. Pavilion Books

Award-winning author-illustrator, Katie Cottle burst onto the children's book scene with *The Green Giant*, a timely eco-adventure about guerrilla gardening, greening our cities and generally making the world a better place to be. One year on and she picks up the environmental theme again, this time turning her attention to the oceans in *The Blue Giant*, which highlights the importance of taking care of our blue planet and shows clearly that we all have a crucial part to play in making our world a better place.

Meera and her mum head to the seaside for a day at the beach, but their peace is disturbed by "a great big giant who seems to be made of the sea" who has something important to show them. As they follow him into the ocean in their little boat he shows them exactly how much rubbish swirls in the ocean and the impact it has on the creatures that live above and below the waves. Meera and her mum do their best but eventually realise it's too big a problem to tackle on their own and come up with a plan that might just make a real difference...

This timely and topical picture book cleverly introduces the important issues around pollution, plastics and waste management. It helps even the youngest eco-warriors understand this pressing environmental issue and inspires them to want to be part of the solution.

The vibrant colour palette of rich blues, almost childlike illustrations and simple storyline make this a superb book for sharing and for starting discussions both at home and at school. Perfectly pitched for preschoolers, EYFS and into KS1, *The Blue Giant* is packed full of important ideas for taking action and ends with a list of small, simple lifestyle changes which have a big impact in reducing single-use plastics.

The overriding message is one of encouragement, empowerment and hope. *The Blue Giant* shows clearly that no-one is too small to make a difference where they live. “Each deed and act of kindness inspires the next. And when everybody helps out even the biggest messes can be fixed.”

Brilliant eco-activism for early years!

Eileen Armstrong

The Cockerel and the Fox

Retelling by Helen Ward, pub. Templar Books

The ancient tale of a proud cockerel and a crafty fox is beautifully retold in Helen Ward’s gorgeous new edition of her award-winning picture book, *The Cockerel and the Fox*.

Chanticleer, meaning ‘domestic cock or rooster’, is the name of the beloved cockerel who wakes the valley at sunrise with his glorious cock-a-doodle-doo. All of the farm animals idolise him, no more so than his adoring wife, Pertelote. One day, a sly fox slips up to the farm gate. Before Chanticleer can warn the other animals, the fox compliments his beautiful voice and asks him to sing again, just for him. Vanity overshadows caution, and when Chanticleer stretches his neck to let out his brilliant sound, the fox snaps him up in his jaw and carries him off to eat him for supper. Pertelote alerts the animals and they all chase the fox until he enters the forest. Fortunately, the chase has given Chanticleer the chance to form a plan. His clever trick outwits the fox and Chanticleer escapes but not before reminding us to be aware of those speaking false flattery.

This classic story, masterfully retold, is accompanied by stunning illustrations also by Helen Ward. In ink, watercolour and gouache, the intricately detailed paintings give texture and tone to the vast array of fowl – turkey, ducks and geese – cows, sheep, goats and farm dogs. The rolling hills, thatched cottage and vegetation are meticulously drawn to reveal the grain in wood stakes, an imperfect leaf on a blooming tree and the fuzzy body of a pollinating bee. Every page of this book is a visual delight.

In addition, the backmatter includes a review of the story from its appearance in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* to fables from the early 17th century and even as far back as Aesop's fables. It includes fascinating ideas for children to contemplate such as the importance of a cockerel's crow to keep a clockless village on schedule. There is also a two-page spread listing and explaining the array of rare breed animals seen in the pages of the book. It is intriguing to study the details of these farm animals and imagine what it might have been like to live on an English farm when this story was first told.

The Cockerel and the Fox is a classic story, beautifully presented, that would make a wonderful edition to a school, library or child's bookshelf.

Victoria Wharam

Crying is like the Rain

Heather Hawk Feinberg, illus. Chamisa Kellogg, pub. Tilbury House Publishers

"Have you ever noticed that after a storm ends, the whole earth feels like it took a big, deep breath? It's the same for you and me. Our tears connect us to ourselves, deep inside. Crying is like the rain."

Crying is like the Rain marks the debut book of Heather Hawk Feinberg, founder of Mindful Kids, and reads as a love letter to her twenty-five years of experience educating and counselling families of all-ages. With a publication date of July 2020, the story is due to be released at a time when many children have been out-of-school and so, those who anxiously await their return, may identify with Kellogg's charming illustrations that tell the tale of a little boy who is tearfully bound for his first day of school. Described as a story of mindfulness and feelings, *Crying is like the Rain* seeks to support children in their lifelong journeys of identifying, understanding and coping with their ever-changing emotions by drawing comparisons to the weather in an intelligent yet accessible way.

There are many messages that can be taken from the story: we are not our feelings; our emotions come and go but should never be ignored; it is important to express ourselves; and even the worst storms come to an end. These lessons in emotional awakening can be reinforced by the excellent suggested activities at the end of the book, helping adults connect to their children through play and dialogue. As a teacher of younger ones, I will most certainly be using *Crying is like the Rain* in my classroom.

Ellie Egleton

Do Grannies Have Green Fingers?

Fransie Frandsen, pub. Artfox

“Mummy’s nails are very green. Daddy’s toes are wrinkly and green. Baby T is green all over. And the neighbour is definitely going green! But what about Granny? Join Alexander in his latest colourful quest to find the answer to the puzzling question: *Do Grannies have green fingers?*”

Do Grannies Have Green Fingers? marks the debut of internationally acclaimed fine artist, Fransie Frandsen’s, fabulously fun picture book series. By drawing on her art therapist expertise, the book playfully explores how children build relationships through the importance of talking and listening to each other. Fransie’s quirky style, reminiscent of Eric Carle and Lauren Child, rearranges images with collage to build a multi-textured world, welcome to all children and adults. Packed with humour and colour, the story follows a young Alexander who aims to find out if Grannies really do have green fingers. But what does this mean? Grown-up idioms can be confusing, especially when angry faces can be “rather red”, cold temperatures can leave you “quite blue” and the amused can be left “tickled pink”, but Alexander and his loveable dog learn a valuable lesson in resilience when they find the answer to their puzzle in Granny’s beautiful garden.

As a teacher, I am confident that *Do Grannies Have Green Fingers?* will survive in the hands of my students as no expense has been spared on the printing of this book, complete with a thick card stock cover. With a price tag of £7.99/\$9.99, Frandsen’s first book is a worthy investment, not only for its charming story but for the details hidden on each page, allowing curious minds to spot something new and different with every read. Don’t just take my word for it, be sure to check out @artfox.bookwolf on Instagram.

Ellie Egleton

Elephant in my Kitchen!

Smriti Halls, illus. Ella Okstad, pub. Egmont Books

Elephant in my Kitchen! is a picture book about various animals moving into a young child’s house and the antics they get up to while refusing to leave.

The book itself stands out extremely well because of the large, bright cover which is neon orange. The first time I picked it up, I almost let out a gasp at how bright it was! While being bright is often a good thing when it comes to children’s books, I actually quite disliked the neon orange. It is not in keeping with the lovely, eco-friendly, nature-coloured inks inside the book and feels a bit at odds with the story. I don’t see why it needed such a gaudy, tacky cover. My feelings about the cover were soon irrelevant. It is clear right from the first page that this is a beautifully illustrated, colourful book which has had a lot of effort and thought put into it. Each page is fun to look at before the story has even started, with little frogs and animals in the corner of the copyright and legal text. Once the story started, I loved reading it out loud. The rhymes flow nicely with a great beat that would captivate and

hold any child's attention. Each animal is doing something funny that is sure to make little ones laugh. I even giggled a couple of times out loud, especially with;

“A tiger's on the toilet
And I'm BURSTING for the loo!
He says it's just a number one...
It's definitely a TWO!”

perhaps being one of my favourite lines in a book ever.

Children love silly rhymes and animals, so it's a great combination, and the illustrations really enhance it. The book feels big, the animals are large and bold along with an easy-to-read font making it perfect for smaller children. Each picture is full of character, the scribbly, child-like style lends itself well in this case in which the story is told from the point of view of a child.

However, there was one thing that bugged me. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but I just didn't like the main character's design. After reading a few times I realised that the problem was the eyes, or at least their face. The illustration style worked well with funny animal faces and they appeared to be full of emotion and character, but the little kid's eyes were so big they were off-putting and his face didn't convey much other than surprise because the eyes were so big. I ended up focusing more on the animals. It's a shame, because the character is clearly androgynous to appeal to both boys and girls, in fact, their gender is never mentioned, which is very inclusive and welcomed.

The book was fun to read and I was enjoying it, then, suddenly it changed. The reason the animals were in the child's house was revealed and the tone became serious. This was a complete surprise to me and not something I could predict in the text, once I realised the message was that the animals had no home because they were being destroyed, the book suddenly had much more meaning to me and I went from liking it to loving it.

The book took on a more educational feel that explained the importance of looking after the environment to keep our animals safe. It was very cleverly done, gaining the attention with fun and silliness to then explain the plan to help the animals go home by saving the environment. 'The BIG plan', explained in the last few pages of the book, are great tips for children to learn and something that will appeal to parents who care about the future of the planet. More children appear and the funny animal rhymes continue but this time they have purpose.

Overall, I felt like this was a special book that I would buy and keep as part of my permanent collection. It could be read to little children every night or read out loud by children and become part of their learning while still being fun. Having a copy in a school or playgroup would be a great hit I'm sure. The important message is backed up by some facts printed in the book. For example, in the front a polar bear holds a sign that the book is printed with vegetable based inks; a nice touch that fits in

well with the theme, and the end pages are one big spread of things we can do to save our planet, each with a little illustration.

I would highly recommend this book to friends and families with kids.

Izzy Bean

Good Guys, Bad Guys

Joanne Rocklin, illus. Nancy Carpenter, pub. Abrams Books for Young Readers

To begin with, *Good Guys, Bad Guys* seems to be a story about bullying and intimidation, showing the baddies as children that are repulsive and frightening. The gaggle of giddy, naughty children suggests trouble is afoot. However, we quickly learn that Good versus Evil can be great fun. Who will win? Which side will you be on? Does it even matter? None of us is perfect - we all have a bit of good and bad in us and this book plays on the motif that the boundary between the two is sometimes blurred.

Good Guys, Bad Guys is a charming picture book for children showing the joys of a large group of children playing and having fun, harking back to pre-Covid days. This sense of nostalgia couldn't have been foreseen by the author yet adds to its appeal in these days of isolation. This book does what books do best – takes us away to another reality & allows us to be part of something that is not possible right now. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be part of a noisy, chaotic game of make-believe with all your classmates right now?

Catherine Millar

The Huffalots

Eve Coy, pub. Andersen Press

When Mum wakes up her young twins in the morning, they appear to have turned overnight into Huffalots – they are grumpy, argumentative and really don't like each other. But as they eat breakfast, a magical transformation takes place and they become Huffalittles, who though still not agreeing on some things, enjoy racing around the park. And if one trips over, the other is there to comfort them, with hugs and gifts of feathers and flowers. This magic continues through the day until they become Lovealots. However, by this time Mum has also become a Huffalot, trying to juggle working, supper, noise and mess. The Lovealots know just what to do and by bedtime everyone is enjoying cuddles and a story.

A gentle exploration of family life, there is lots to enjoy, find and talk about in the softly coloured pictures of this book. The story can also help young children understand that their feelings and behaviour can impact on other people, especially their carers, without being didactic. A warm hug of a book just right for snuggling up with.

Jayne Gould

Hugo

Atinuke, illus. Birgitta Sif, pub. Walker Books

This is the totally delightful story of a Parisian pigeon called Hugo who oversees life around the square where he lives. He plays with the children, supports the older residents and even makes friends with many of the local animals. One day he becomes aware that one apartment always has the curtains drawn, but that there is a 'someone' who peeks out at the world in the square. When Hugo is injured by a dog, it is the 'someone' who takes him home and nurses him back to health. The ending of the story emphasizes the need for community and sharing and brings a glow to the reader.

I love the delicacy and style of the illustrations that seem to exemplify the atmosphere of Paris. The use of pencil and pale watercolours really give a feeling of place and yet there is a timeless quality about the setting; this provides a very sophisticated feel to the illustrations. This is a story that has short sections of text, which balance the wealth of pictures and the tale is told in the first person by Hugo, so we see things from the perspective of the pigeon, rather than the humans. Whilst the story is aimed at the KS1 reader it can also be read with KS2 children because it opens up many questions about some of the characters, but especially about the 'someone'. Altogether a beautiful book.

Margaret Pemberton

I Am Perfectly Designed

Karamo Brown and Jason "Rachel" Brown, illus. Anoosha Syed, pub. Macmillan

This picture book is dedicated to 'every child and adult who has ever felt different or not good enough.' Throughout the book the reader follows a father and son as they start the day together with breakfast, then walk through the city, visit the park and finally find their way home together at the end of the day. Through Anoosha's delightful illustrations we join the two as they share different activities and recall different memories. The text is a back and forth of conversation between father and son which highlights and allows us to see how the little boy is becoming more aware of himself and of his changing relationship with his father through the passage of time (the differences between the two are celebrated). The son remembers how his father has looked after him and reassured him, and always been there for him. The father continues to reassure his son how perfectly designed for life

and for the things that he will face. There is also the reassurance that they will always be there for each other, even though their roles may change and they might inevitably not be together all of the time.

I am Perfectly Designed is a great book about the relationship between father and son. It continues to offer reassurance and encouragement along the way and will stand many readings and food for thought for class discussion.

Damian Harvey

Ig Pig and Og Frog

Sophie Burrows, pub. David Fickling Books

Ig Pig and Og Frog are as close as best friends can be. They love playing the same games, eating the same food (big juicy worm burgers, anyone?) and they even have their own rock band – but not just any old rock band: it's a super cool, crazy loud, totally rocking rock band! That is until the morning a newcomer floats onto the scene. Bog Frog. She pitches up out of nowhere, looking – to Ig – suspiciously like Og's best friend.

The arrival of this stranger does not bring out the best in Ig. Og and Bog try to include him, but tensions begin to rumble and build and finally Ig erupts in a mighty tantrum which ruins everything for everyone.

Poor Ig – you've got to love him! He wears his heart on his sleeve and Sophie Burrows' illustrations capture his tempestuous emotions so brilliantly. There is a double page of Ig, lying flat out, the picture of forlorn, deflated despondence after his outburst. It's heart-rending!

Og and Bog, like kind, little frogs, work hard to make him feel better and eventually Ig realises he has been super jealous, crazy mean and totally grumpy. There are apologies all round.

This exuberant book explores the sometimes-rocky road to friendship. It champions being open-hearted and inclusive. The illustrations zoom out for big feelings with dramatic impact, but they also zoom in on very funny details. The end pages are definitely worth a mention: feast your eyes on a riot of music posters with visual puns specially for the grown-ups.

This is Sophie Burrows' picture book debut. She is going to have fans galore!

Jackie Spink

In the City

Holly James, illus. Hannah Tolson, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

The latest in a long tradition of picture books which encourage the youngest readers to rediscover items they know in everyday life, and also to discover new things they will encounter in specific environments. Unlike the tried-and-tested Richard Scarry picture books, which more than half a century ago used anthropomorphic characters to explore a wide variety of places and activities in Busytown, Holly James and Hannah Tolson see new scenarios through the eyes of a pair of apparently mixed-race children, Oscar and Lucy. Oscar and Lucy go on a day out with their parents/carers, first getting ready, taking a map with them and ensuring they catch the train in time. In fact, readers are never told if the two adults are their parents or carers, a welcome approach which means that the text is equally appropriate to children in different domestic or care situations. When they reach the station (looking surprisingly like an interchange between the mainline and underground areas at Waterloo) items we can see – such as a suitcase, a bird, a train driver – are labelled, and readers are invited to search the spread for additional, specific, information. The departures board offers journeys to cities all over the world, and 'the city' is non-specific.

They visit the museum, the bustle of the city itself, a skyscraper, then have a picnic in the park (obviously not lockdown then!), take a trip on the river (which does look like London), then go shopping and on a bus tour, before they go home and to bed.

Each spread operates in the same way, information, new vocabulary labelling images, then questions to invite readers to engage with other details. The final spread is a visual glossary to remind us of some of the places and objects we have seen.

James and Tolson have collaborated to give young readers, and carers, bright, colourful, informative scenes of everyday life in a typical city which will encourage a great deal of discussion, questions and comments on each page.

Readers will hope that other books will appear where Oscar and Lucy, and readers, can discover other places and activities.

Bridget Carrington

Lisette's Green Sock

Catharina Valckx, trans. Anthony Shugaar, illus. Catharina Valckx, pub. Gecko Press

In this picture book, Lisette, a duck, finds a green sock, which pleases her, and she puts it on. Tomcat and Timcat tease her and say that socks come in pairs, so she sets off in search of the other one.

Fish in the pond hasn't seen it, but she has found a coffee pot and a rake. Lisette sadly goes home, and her Mum washes the sock and hangs it up to dry. Her friend Bert, a mouse, admires what he thinks is a hat, and Lisette lets him wear it on his head. Tomcat and Timcat come over and dangle the other sock in front of them, then run away. The friends almost catch them, but the cats throw the sock into the pond, and tell them it flew away, though Bert knows that socks do not fly. Sadly, the friends go back to Lisette's house, and Bert is only allowed to keep wearing the hat until they get there. They discover that Mum has knitted another sock, so they both have hats. Bert is especially pleased, and they both go to sleep in their hats. The final page shows Fish, delighting in her coffee pot, rake – and her new green sleeping bag.

Lisette's Green Sock is a charming story, beautifully illustrated, and the young reader can be glad that the bullies do not win after all.

Catharina Valckx has written and illustrated more than thirty books and been nominated four times for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. Her books are written in French but published in eleven languages and have won numerous awards. On the strength of this one it would seem to be worth looking out for her work.

Diana Barnes

Little Blue House Beside the Sea

Jo Ellen Bogart, illus. Carme Lemniscates, pub. Tilbury House Publishers

“There is a special place for me – a little blue house besides the sea. It nestles on its cliffs so high and watches as the boats go by.”

In a world where travel has now become difficult, transport your child to the ocean with the critically acclaimed creative team who, individually, are behind several best-selling titles. Although it is a simple story that follows a little girl across the shore and through a storm, the book carries a deeper meaning.

The little blue house could be overlooking any ocean, and the narrator could be any child anywhere, gazing out over the waters, thinking about all the places s/he could go and imagining other little blue houses on other shores, with other children gazing back. Now more than ever, this message of unity is so important. We should be teaching our children to make connections with those from different backgrounds as at the end of the day, we all share the great, wide, wonderful world.

At the back of the book, in ‘A Note from Jo Ellen’, this message is conveyed beautifully through a personal childhood anecdote and a plea that we look after the oceans that serve us so well.

Overall, I can envision the lyrical *Little Blue House Beside the Sea* next to the likes of *The Storm Whale* by Benji Davies and for those curious to what lives in the sea, *The Big Book of the Blue* by Yuval Zommer.

Ellie Egleton

The Lost Leopard

Jonny Marx, illus. Xuan Le, pub. 360 Degrees

Let me start by saying I am a huge fan of the animal kingdom and all it can teach us. It is so important that children are engaged with this topic and a book like this will do just that.

The Lost Leopard is a real gem of a book; it is the right mix of fact with fiction. It follows the ‘world’s greatest explorer’ family; Flora, Fauna and their baby, Bud, on their adventure to find the most elusive of the wild cats – the clouded leopard. Their adventure takes them across all terrains, through all weathers and teaches us important environmental lessons along the way.

As the adventure progresses, we are introduced to many animals along the way, each one subtly labelled. Everything from a tiny butterfly to the Indian elephant make an appearance, with everything in between.

The stars of this book though are the illustrations and quirky page designs, complete with flaps and fold-out pages. The detail in each page is incredible and it is easy to get lost in each scene. You can enjoy the bustling, colourful markets, the rushing rivers, hills and valleys and jungles to name but a few.

I am a big fan of this book and I hope there will be more to come!

Victoria Wharam

Meet Monster

Ellen Blance and Ann Cook, illus. Quentin Blake, pub. New York Review of Books

Monster was first introduced in 1973, and these 6 stories have been collected into a format that looks like a chapter book, but it is intended for beginner readers.

Monster is a tall purple creature, not at all scary. In the first story he comes to a city, notes lots of things about it, and decides to stay. In the second story, he looks for a house. Amazingly, he looks at a few unsuitable houses before he finds a tall thin house that looks perfect, and he just moves in. He

doesn't seem to have or earn any money, but he furnishes it and lives comfortably. Unless children have had experience of moving house, they will probably just take all this at face value. In the remaining stories, he cleans his house, looks for a friend, meets a lady monster, and has fun with a magic umbrella.

The language is simple, but it is American, so he goes to the railroad station, a child 'jumps rope' instead of skipping, and the wardrobe is called a closet, but the illustrations serve to clarify these differences. Monster is 'kind of tired' or the house is 'kind of nice', and there are some examples of exclamations like 'Oh boy!' but, generally, children exposed to American films and television will probably cope with this. The text is very clear and bold, with simple 'a' and 'g', and there are usually only a few lines on each page.

Quentin Blake's illustrations are as excellent as we have come to expect, and your reviewer needs say no more. The authors are both experts in child education and teacher training. Ellen Blance comes originally from Newcastle, but she has lived and worked in the USA since 1970.

Monster books have been widely praised and translated into other languages, and there is even an animation available. This charming compilation will certainly have its place in the school library or home bookshelf.

Diana Barnes

My Rhino Is Better Than Yours

Bec Barnes, pub. David Fickling Books

Two children, a girl and a boy, both have rhinos, one blue and one red, and they argue over whose rhino is best. Each rhino has different characteristics – they are mighty and strong, daring and brave, can shrink really small or can grow really big. As the argument progresses, the children get crosser and crosser, more insistent that their rhino is the best, making wild and exaggerated claims that involve smelly bottoms and flying to the stars to try and outdo each other when suddenly they hear a rumbly, thumping, snorting, grunting noise and the ground starts shaking.

An amusing story told in rhyme that will connect with young children and that has a refrain to encourage them to join in. There's a lot to see and discuss on the pages – my favourite is the rhino who has outfits for each day of the week although I suspect children will be drawn to the rude rhino – and the illustrations are bright, big and bold making excellent use of the pages. Good to see diversity and a lack of girl/boy stereotyping too.

Barbara Band

Penpals Forever

C K Smouha, illus. Jürg Lindenberger, pub. Cicada Books

Penpals Forever is a story about two characters that couldn't be more different – they live in completely different parts of the world, enjoy completely different interests and are completely different sizes!

Freddy's a skateboarding, pizza-loving mouse, who lives with his friend, Pete. Annabel, however, is a science-loving elephant, who enjoys carrying out lab experiments. C K Smouha's story begins with Freddy and Pete minding their own business; skateboarding and eating pizza, when, suddenly, a huge white object floats from the sky and lands in front of them – what could it be? It's a giant letter!

Here starts an amazing friendship, as letters are sent to and fro, sharing their different lives and interests via good old-fashioned pen and paper, until one day, Pete stops writing and Annabel becomes concerned for her friend. Wanting to find out what is wrong, she sets off on her adventure to the big city to help him. One good turn deserves another, but you'll have to read the book to find out what.

Each of Jürg Lindenberger's pages are brightly illustrated and the illustrations cleverly play with size and scale. The energy of life in the big city is demonstrated by the busyness of the pages and the pictures are complemented by die cuts, flaps and an amazing use of interesting colours.

This is a fun book that's ultimate message is about accepting and tolerating differences, looking out for each other and, quite simply, how to be a good friend.

This book would be a welcomed addition to any child's bookshelf, in the primary age range and their grown-up alike!

Claire Webb

Rabbit's Spring Gift

Anita Loughrey, illus. Lucy Barnard, pub. QED Publishing

Hop along with little Rabbit and explore the wonders of springtime in this delightfully charming picture book from Armadillo reviewer Anita Loughrey's must read *A Year in Nature* series!

With mum busy spring cleaning their warren, Rabbit and her brother go in search for the perfect springtime thank you gift. But when a cheeky competition has the two in a race to out-do the other, will they realise that the perfect gift might be a little closer to home?

Jumping through vegetables plots and rummaging through flower patches, peering in ponds and skipping past bees, the rabbits are quick to find gifts in the form of beautiful blooming daffodils, tasty treats and fluffy feathers. With each gift, illustrator Lucy Barnard beautifully captures the joys, colours and new life of springtime, but it's Rabbit's mum reminder that, the greatest gift is you, that was most joyous of all.

I love that this series not only offers a charming window into the changing seasons, but also includes spring inspired activities – think pond dipping and flower collages – and seasonal discussion points at the back for further learning about the natural world.

A Year in Nature also includes *Frog's Summer Journey*, *Squirrel's Autumn Puzzle* and *Fox's Winter Discovery*.

Fern Tolley

Unstoppable

Adam Rex and Laura Park, pub. Chronicle Books

Unstoppable by Adam Rex and Laura Park is a funny take on cooperation and creative mashups. Luna Park's colourful illustrations perfectly compliment Adam Rex's witty text.

After a cat pesters both a crab and a crow, the crustacean and bird team up to get their revenge by creating a creature that can both fly AND pinch the cat's nose. They begin to feel unstoppable!

The animal partnerships expand from there until they make a team that truly can do anything. The plot takes an unexpected turn as the 'Queen of America' is brought onboard to help the animals solve an immediate threat to their habitat. But it doesn't stop there. The 'Queen', who we learn is really the President, convinces the animals to work with the US Congress to change the law. And so, the greatest mashup of all, 'Congresibirdraburtlebear'... flies 'over this great land—passing laws and pinching the noses that need to be pinched.' This plot twist seemed a little over the top, but it works, and drives home an important message about cooperation.

Unstoppable is a timely picture book about celebrating the ways we are all unique and how when we come together, we all can save the day. A recommended read-aloud book for children interested in animals, the environment, and political action.

Evelyn Bookless

Willow the Armadillo

Marilou Reeder, illus. Dave Mottram, pub. Abrams Young Readers

Willow the Armadillo has always loved picture books. Right from being very small, she would go to the Library and bring home as many picture books as she could carry and as she read them, she wanted to be the hero of a picture book of her own, to be the hero who can fly, the hero who has a magic wand and, above all, to be the hero everyone looks up to.

To make her dream come true, Willow enrolls at Madame Tigress's Picture Book Academy and, wearing her fiery yellow zig zag tee shirt, works very hard, learning how to be a cowboy, how to lift heavy things and how to rescue those in trouble.

When Willow graduates from the Academy, she is sure she will win an audition at the Future Picture Book Hero Try Outs to be in her very own picture book. Unhappily, Willow fails all her auditions until she is so sad, she curls up into a ball. The Library usually makes Willow feel better but not when she goes this time because all her classmates have picture books of their own and she doesn't.

Suddenly, the Library lights go out and frighten all the little animals crying for their mommy, but Willow saves the day, shining her tiny reading light into the darkness and reading stories. The illustration for the small animals listening to Willow's stories, still with tears on their dear little faces, makes you want to reach into the book and dry them.

The big surprise in Willow the Armadillo is that the grateful animals make her a picture book of her very own, making Willow, a real-life hero, very happy.

The story is told in clear and easy to follow sentences, great for reading aloud and for listening to. The silky pages invite the reader to touch and the illustrations are wonderful, so bright and colourful, detailed and vibrant, every character seizes their moment and leaps into appealing life on the page. A lovely book.

Gwen Grant

Junior Book Reviews

The Beast and the Bethany

Jack Meggitt-Phillips, illus. Isabelle Follath, pub. Egmont

Mr Ebenezer Tweezer has become accustomed to the wonderful things in life though he rarely notices or appreciates them any longer. When we first meet Ebenezer, he is buying a beautiful and talented “Wintlorian Purple-Breasted Parrot”. As a reader we believe it is to keep him company and to stop him feeling lonely as he approaches his 512th birthday. However, by the end of the chapter we realise the truth.

On the very top floor of Ebenezer’s house lives a beast. Grey with “three black eyes, two black tongues and a large dribbling mouth”, he is horrific to look at and smells even worse. The beast is the key to the wonders that fill Ebenezer’s home for after he is fed, he will vomit up whatever Ebenezer wishes for. Gross but important!

Ebenezer is beholden to the beast for the potions that keep him looking youthful and feeling young. When the beast asks for his next meal, Ebenezer learns new emotions and must deal with his conscience.

Adopting an unruly, rude child named Bethany creates more havoc in Ebenezer’s life. Bethany makes a mess and challenges Ebenezer constantly. He has sealed her fate in exchange for his youth- will he be able to feed the beast?

This is the start of a new, dark and twisted series, perfect for fans of Lemony Snicket’s *Series of Unfortunate Events*. With moments of friendship, beastliness, danger and learning to stand up for yourself, it is one to watch in 2020!

Erin Hamilton

The Boy Who Made the World Disappear

Ben Miller, illus. Daniela Jaglenka Terrazzin, pub. Simon and Schuster

Harrison is a good kid, he always tries vegetables at least three times a day, he is kind to his younger sister, he never lies to anyone, cheats at anything or even steals anything. In fact he is perfect in absolutely every way, apart from his bad temper. Well he couldn’t really be that perfect could he. Harrison has a temper, he has a really bad temper, so bad that his family calls it a code red. As the story develops the scene is set but we do not know if it is set for Harrison to explode or for an

adventure to begin. The class bully is having a birthday party and instead of a balloon he is given a black hole.

Harrison realises that with this black hole he can get rid of objects that he doesn't like, so in goes the next door neighbour's dog, broccoli, school books and the local swimming pool. He thinks that this is great and it is all going quite well until he accidentally gets rid of the house next door ... before too long it gets even worse when his parents go in. The story becomes a race against time for Harrison to rescue his parents before the black hole shrinks and his parents are lost forever.

I am not going to spoil the story by revealing any more of the plot, you will have to read the book to discover if he manages to sort all his mess out!

Written by a television personality I have to say I was (and always am) sceptical before I begin these books, I always wonder if they are going to be any good. Being a personality does not automatically equate to being a good writer. Well, I can tell you that Ben Miller is an amazing author, the book is so funny that you will find yourself laughing out loud, the story is so full of twists and turns that you will also find yourself unable to put the book down. You will be gutted when you get to the end – but you could just read again! Cleverly you will find yourself being educated about science and black holes without realising it.

In addition, the illustrations have been brilliantly drawn and there is so much detail in them that you will be as absorbed by them as by the written words. So much to enjoy in this must-read book.

Helen Byles

Hello, Universe

Erin Entrada Kelly, pub. Piccadilly

This is the story of four young people, who go to the same school, but don't really know each other. Their lives come together in a most unexpected way and this leads to great changes in their lives. The central character is Virgil, a young boy whose family is from the Philippines. He is the youngest and quietest in the family and really resents the way he is still considered a small child. Valencia shares one of his classes, but he is too shy to talk to her, so he asks Kaori (who tells fortunes for other children) to help. The final character is Chet, the local bully, who through his behavior sets the whole incident off. How these young people come together and resolve the situation makes for a wonderfully simple and yet very profound look at relationships and whether there is such a thing as fate.

This book won the American Newbery Medal in 2018, which highlights the quality of the writing. The story is very low key in many ways and the children themselves are quite ordinary. It is the way that the author brings together these people and slowly blends the various strands of the story which make it such a wonderful read. The story is told from the viewpoint of several of the characters so that we are finding out about events at the same time as them; we get a real sense of their individual traits and they become very real to the reader. It is a really excellent read for middle grade children.

Margaret Pemberton

Lena the Sea and Me

Maria Parr, trans. Guy Puzey, pub. Walker Books

Lena the Sea and Me follows a year of adventures with Trille and his next-door neighbour and best friend Lena. To emphasise this, and help the story develop naturally, *Lena the Sea and Me* is split into seasons.

This book is the much-awaited sequel to Maria Parr's debut novel *Adventures with Waffles* (also published under the title *Waffle Hearts*), which was translated into twenty languages and won several awards around the world. Both books are set in Mathildewick Cove in Norway and portray a realistic relationship of the highs and lows of friendship and growing up.

Written from Trille's point of view we learn a lot about both Trille and his next-door neighbour and best friend Lena's characters and families. The stage is set for a dramatic year ahead, dark clouds are looming and a horrific storm hits Mathildewick Cove, Norway. Trille and Lena have to fight the elements and their own emotions in that Lena has to wrestle against the new football's coach sexism and nepotism when she is benched from her position as goalkeeper, even though she is by far the better player and Trille is infatuated with the new girl, Brigit, who has moved into the bay but when his grandfather has a serious injury on his boat, Troll, Lena is there to help him and refuses to let Grandpa or Trille give up hope.

All the characters are well formed and seep under your skin, staying with you long after you have finished the book. The reader feels like they know them and understand them. I would like to read more about the lives of Trille and Lena.

Anita Loughrey

Reviewer's Website: www.anitaloughrey.com

Anita Loughrey's most recent books are a series of picture books based around the seasons, called *A Year in Nature*, published by Quarto and illustrated by Lucy Barnard. *Rabbit's Spring Gift* and *Frog's Summer Journey* were released on the 17th March 2020. *Squirrel's Autumn Puzzle* and *Fox's Winter Discovery* have been rescheduled to be released September 2021.

Midnight's Twins

Holly Race, pub. Hot Key Books

Fern loathes her twin brother Ollie and is jealous of his popularity. Ollie hates her in return. She bears terrible scars to prove it, the result of being set alight by one of his friends in his presence. What's more, her eyes are red. People recoil from her because of her appearance. She is bullied and lonely.

The twins' mother Una died when they were just months old. It is only now, at the age of fifteen, that Fern finds out that her mother's death may not have been the peaceful one they have been led to believe. The reader has already intimated this, since the book starts with Una's last moments, as she attempts to return to her babies from some unexplained parallel London that is fraught with danger. She nearly makes it, but then encounters a terrifying monster. Fern struggles to unearth the truth. She discovers a mirror world, Annwn, which has the landscape of modern London and many of the buildings, but transmogrified into the stuff of legend. Only a very few humans can move back and forwards from their normal life in Ithr through portals into Annwn. Fewer still can join the ancient order of knights, a position Una held, as Fern has found out. Both she and her brother gain the coveted role. Both turn out to have extraordinary, supernatural abilities. They begin their lengthy training to become effective warriors against the terrible dangers humans face in dreamworld. For the first time ever, Fern makes friends. She is accepted. But she learns some hard lessons, aspects of herself that are far from comfortable. Gradually she and Ollie start to trust each other. And they need to. Charismatic populist Sebastien Medraut is gaining influence in both Ithr and Annwn. His great power is thought control. He is building a culture of hatred against anyone perceived to be different. Both worlds are in peril. There are thousands of deaths.

This is a complex novel that runs to over four hundred pages. The characters, the twisting plot and the mirrored settings are intriguing creations. Lovers of fantasy will find lots to enjoy in this first of a trilogy, provided they do not mind violence and death. Interesting and important issues are explored: sibling dynamics, bullying, betrayal, the responsibilities of power, the dangers of populism and one-party politics.

Anne Harding

My Name is River

Emma Rea, pub. Firefly Press

Dylan is devastated to learn that his family farm in Wales has been sold off to a multinational corporation called BlueBird. His friend Floyd's Dad works for BlueBird, but he's currently in Brazil with Floyd's little brother, and Floyd and his Mum are worried that something is wrong as they have lost touch with him. Dylan and Floyd hatch a crazy plan to fly to Brazil, bring Floyd's brother home and save Dylan's family farm. En route, they meet the charming Lucia, a resilient street child with a

peculiar range of vocabulary (because she learned English by reading a thesaurus), and her Great Dane, Pernickety. Their quest takes them to Manaus and on a boat up the river and deep into the Amazon Rainforest to confront a heartless villain with a horrifying agenda.

My Name is River evokes the same sense of adventure as Eva Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea*, through a more contemporary lens. It is a gripping story of friendship and courage, saturated in the sights, sounds and scents of the rainforest, with a vitally important message about environmental conservation. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Rebecca Rouillard

Nowhere on Earth

Nick Lake, pub. Hodder Children's Books

This story starts with a plane crash. A small plane crashes into the side of a snowy mountain. There are survivors; Emily, a teenage girl and her younger brother, Aidan. There is also the pilot Bob. At the beginning this is all we know, but there is an immediate sense that this is going to be an exciting adventure. We don't yet know what happened before the plane journey. We know very little about the characters. There is a sense of intrigue and still that feeling that this will develop into something more than a simple survival story.

As the story develops there are hints that some of the characters are not what they seem. Something has happened to Emily before the plane journey and there is definitely something strange about Aidan. As the characters start to interact and find out about each other, their first aim is to escape from the mountain alive. As they attempt to do this, it is evident that they are being pursued by some men with guns. Who are these men and why are they desperate to track down Emily and Aidan? The plot very soon becomes more complex than a simple chase. With each chapter we learn more about the characters and eventually we find out what happened before the plane journey. We learn about Emily's parents and her relationship with them. They do eventually arrive on the mountain, searching for Emily.

This is a story full of questions, intrigue and excitement. It could have been a simple fight for survival after a plane crash, but it becomes far more than that. It develops into an account of family and relationships. The parents become more involved later in the story, as we find out about past events. This is an action and adventure story with a message. There is a dramatic plane crash, but there is much more to discover.

This story will appeal to younger teenagers, both boys and girls, looking for an adventure with a twist. The plot develops with each chapter and there are answers towards the end. The story is about the

struggles to survive from the elements, from some sinister pursuers and from the past. It also tackles the relationships between a teenage girl and her parents, a strange young boy and an older pilot.

Gary Kenworthy

The Pear Affair

Judith Eagle, pub. Faber and Faber

When Penelope Magnificent's terrible parents announce they are taking a business trip to Paris, she begs to come along with them. But Nell has no intention of staying docile for too long – she has an agenda of her own. Paris holds something dear to Nell: her beloved au pair Perrine, who left her position under mysterious circumstances... But Pear has kept in contact with Nell, reassuring her that she will one day come to rescue her from her money-obsessed parents. So, when Pear's letters suddenly stop, Nell is determined to find her. At the same time, Paris is facing a crisis of its own: a strange type of mould is attacking the boulangeries, putting the famous Parisian cuisine at peril! Is there a link between Pear's disappearance and this disease? With the help of the hotel bellboy and some other friends along the way, Nell takes to the tunnels below the city of Paris to find Pear - and is swept up in a bigger mystery than she bargained for.

Reminiscent of *Madeline* and *Matilda* (with a touch of *Alice in Wonderland* for good measure!), this is a fun and quirky tale teeming with wonderful characters. Judith Eagle beautifully evokes the atmosphere of 1960s Paris, balancing the glamour, chic designers and mouth-watering boulangeries with the darker underbelly. *The Pear Affair* revolves around some endearing character relationships as a band of unlikely friends are thrown together in a common cause. With their help, Nell learns more of love and camaraderie than she could ever have thought possible. On her journey to find Pear, Nell navigates the underground networks with resolve and determination, facing her own personal fears of love and rejection... as well as subterranean darkness and even catacombs!

Perfect for fans of Katherine Rundell's *Rooftoppers*, this is a highly enjoyable mystery bursting with French charm and enhanced by Kim Geyer's beautiful chapter heading illustrations.

Jess Zahra

Poems Aloud

Joseph Coelho, illus. Daniel Gray-Barnett, pub. Wide-Eyed Editions

Written by Joseph Coelho and illustrated by Daniel Gray-Barnett, this is an absolute delight of a book.

Its premise is that "poems are for reading aloud" and it contains tongue-twisters and riddles alongside performance poetry. There are plays on words and sounds, tips to help you bring the poems to life and techniques to help you build your confidence. All with bright, vibrant and amusing illustrations.

The contents page has a key indicating poems that are "hot" (one chilli) or "extra hot" (two chillies) - highlighting those that may have difficult words or themes so you can build up to them. Impossible to choose a favourite; the *Chilly Chilli* with its clever use of homophones? *Speedy Rocket* that you have to read as fast as you can? *This Bear* (this heavy bear, this happy bear, this home bear) with its slower reading pace and soft gentle pages depicting a glowing sunset? *The Shockadile Crocodile* that encourages audience participation? or *Say How You Feel*, a poem that engenders children to explore their emotions?

Each page reveals a new delight.

For anyone who has had the pleasure of watching Joseph Coelho perform, the vibrancy of this book will come as no surprise. Definitely one for every library, every classroom and everyone who loves to read aloud ...

Barbara Band

Rebel with a Cupcake

Anna Mainwaring, pub. Firefly Press

In Anna Mainwaring's novel her narrator Jess explores the impact of fatphobia, where society constantly devalues and targets fat bodies. We see clearly how this process builds a harsh internal world of self-criticism in women of all ages.

Jess dwells on the ways society constantly tries to convince us that weight and a person's worth are linked, but even though she is aware, she still struggles with many negative beliefs about herself. They continue to resurface, fully convincing Jess of her lack of worth even against her efforts to the contrary.

It is extremely emotional and powerful to read this familiar feeling, of how stuck and low it is possible to feel having absorbed fatphobia - even when we feel we have growing awareness of it.

Indeed, the relationship between Jess and her sister, who eats very little and diets restrictively, is initially one with problems coming from both sides. Jess initially struggles not to be critical of her sister for her dieting, but their communication develops well through the novel, as she tries later to help encourage a more intuitive approach to food for both of them. Hopefully seeing Jess' sister in the

restless place of never being satisfied or comfortable with her own self, always finding another imperfection, will help readers be kinder to themselves.

There are several scenes of public harassment and bullying in the novel. These powerfully show the lived experience of trauma resulting from fatphobia. However, for a book directly examining western society's obsession with thinness, it would do well to acknowledge how this obsession served British colonialism. This is not to say Jess' narrative isn't valuable. But when directly discussing the 'invisible rules' governing body image in western society, it's crucial to recognise that cis white women and girls retain other privileges. Their experiences sit among those of many others who must be foregrounded.

Jemima Breeds

Sofia the Dreamer and Her Magical Afro

Jessica Wilson, pub. Tallawah Publishing

"My hair is a symbol of power, declares the woman, raising her fist." This beautiful exclamation from Jessica Wilson's book reminded me of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's exposition on hair as a symbol of power and the award-winning animation *Hair Love*, all sharing the message of hair as a means of self-expression for womxn and mxn of colour.

Sofia, the titular character, is a little girl with a flourishing afro hair, she dreams a lot and travels through the astral realm each time she dozes off; there she meets her ancestors as a Rastafarians, and activists and plantation workers; come alive from the past, narrating how hair has been styled and presented to show an individual's and a culture's expression. The message of love that comes through the ritual of hair care is one of heartfelt acknowledgement-

"Sofia dozes and floats up through her open window, keeps rising until the world is a dot and she is hovering by the moon...The galaxy is a spiral, just like her curls! Up above, Sofia thinks of her mum and realises what respect and unity have in common.

Sofia knows it is love.

Love washes your hair and combs through the tangles. Love is joy. Love empowers. When you are unwell love buys you flowers. Love is a gift from the ancestors to their sons and daughters."

Coupled with these expressions is the breathtaking artwork by Tom Rawles. I definitely recommend *Sofia the Dreamer and Her Magical Afro*, to be shared with all ages, to help everyone relish the diversity in hair as well as in lives along with the message of acknowledgement and awareness of people of colour and their rich and powerful socio-historical narrative, culture and expressions of selves.

Ishika Tiwari

The Strangeworlds Travel Agency

L D Lapinski, pub. Orion Children's Books

12-year-old Flick Hudson is far from impressed by her family's move from a city tower block to a sleepy rural village in an attempt at a better quality of life. Her parents work long hours to make ends meet leaving Flick to look after her demanding but frequently hilarious baby brother. Escaping these big sister duties to explore her new village one day she stumbles upon a dilapidated old travel agency and is inextricably drawn inside.

What lurks inside is stranger still - walls lined with teetering piles of old suitcases rather than glossy brochures and posters of far-flung holiday destinations, and a surly, initially unwelcoming, teenage boy with a special talent for performing magic tricks who seems to be in charge. He reveals that these suitcases hide strange magical worlds - all you need to do is jump inside and follow the magic rule ("don't lose your suitcase!"). Discovering that Flick has hitherto undiscovered magical powers, Jonathan invites her to join the Strangeworlds Society and to travel through the multiverse with him. It is on one of these visits, to the central world of Five Lights, that the pair become separated and Flick is left in a race against time to solve the sinister disappearance of Jonathan's dad and to prevent the magical multiverse she has journeyed into from collapsing, taking our world with it.

Portal fantasy fiction is nothing new but Strangeworlds is in a league of its own in terms of the meticulous mechanics of travel, inventive world-building, huge imagination and stunning attention to detail. This is far from being just a series of visits to other uncharted worlds via a suitcase however. With every visit to another world, each with its one carefully devised set of rules, we discover more about the characters - Flick largely left to her own devices by hard working parents struggling to make ends meet, burdened with extensive childcare duties but not scared to stand up for herself when she needs to, Jonathan mourning the death of his mother and sudden disappearance of his father, previous Head Custodian of the Strangeworlds Society and now struggling to cope with his new responsibility. Both are lonely but for very different reasons and we come to care deeply about them. There are flashes of very real edge-of-the-seat danger too, threatening characters and humour - chiefly in the character of the witty receptionist of Five Worlds - as well as strong themes of family and friendship and important environmental messages about the dangers of wasting valuable and irreplaceable resources.

Strangeworlds is brilliant escapism; a classical fantasy adventure brought bang up to date. It unfolds like a film, perfectly balancing real-world issues and magic, exploring the extraordinary to be found in the very, very ordinary. There's something for every kind of reader here. Fantasy fans will adore the epic world-building, realism readers will love the completely believable characters and their ever-

changing relationships, thrill seekers will love the dangerous rescues and the pacey race against time to save the world. Best of all, though complete in itself, this quirky debut is left wide open for a sequel - I can't wait!

Teachers and librarians need to know that a brilliant pack of "classroom ideas and cross-curricular activities around themes of travel, world-building, magic and environmental issues" is available, backed up by youtube author videos of writing prompts and instructions for making your very own Strangeworlds suitcase (<https://www.ldlapinski.com/learning-resources>).

If you've enjoyed the *Wondrous Society of Nevermoor*, have journeyed on the *Train to Impossible Places*, joined *The Polar Bear Explorers' Club* or visited the *Land of Roar* you definitely need to visit *The Strangeworlds Travel Agency* to see where it will take you!

Eileen Armstrong

That Time I Got Kidnapped

Tom Mitchell, pub. Harper Collins

Fourteen-year-old Jacob wins a competition to feature in a superhero movie.

"Don't miss your connection," warns his father as he sets off towards snow-bound Chicago where he has to change on to a plane to Los Angeles. He misses his connection - and gets kidnapped by Jennifer and her mysterious package.

There is no romance or sex in this story or in the connection that forms between the two characters but there is affection, eventually, and a growing relationship. Jacob and Jennifer are pitted against the grown-ups. This probably makes the text suitable for younger teens.

Jacob is naive. Jennifer is badass. Both characters mellow and grow as the story is told.

Tom Mitchell keeps us on the edge of our seats as calamity follows calamity for Jacob. Will he get to the studio in time? What will happen when he gets there? Perhaps importantly what will happen next? Mitchell not only gives us a satisfying ending but leaves it open for a whole new story. We hope he will write it.

This is an easy book to read. Its twists and turns provide tension. The chapters are short and almost all end on a cliff-hanger and thus pace is maintained. There is much humour. Jacob's convincing voice keeps us engaged throughout.

Gill James

Gill James' *Girl in a Smart Uniform* is published by Chapeltown Books.

We Are Bound By Stars

Kesia Lupo, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

In *We are Bound by Stars* we once again return to the richly imagined, magical world of the Valorian Continent, but this time to Scarossa, home of Mythris and the masked temple.

The two main protagonists, Livio and Beatrice, alternate in telling their story. Both are struggling to accept the path they've been told is their future, both wonder if there is another life available to them, one of their own choosing. Livio is belligerent about his position as descendent of the most powerful Scarossan family and the mapped out destiny this entails for him. He much prefers his adopted persona of Vico, who feels more at ease amongst the people in the town than being tucked away in the Palazzo. Beatrice is the middle sister of triplets, taken at birth and irretrievably tied to the temple of Mythris to continue the unbroken line of mascherari mask-makers, creating masks of special powers. Beatrice yearns for a different life in which she can travel and explore the world outside, as all she's ever known is the mascherari house.

Lupo deftly draws the reader into the differing, yet similar, worlds of Bea and Livio and as their respective stories evolve fate steps in to unite them in a quest to stop a deadly revolution, designed to bring down everything they've been raised to believe in. The fantasy worldbuilding is fast-paced, full of detail, intrigue and suspense with some surprising, and unexpected, plot twists. Lupo unfolds the story gracefully, adding little nuggets of detail which set the scene for later, but without distracting from the main plotline.

Kesia Lupo's stunning sequel to *We Are Blood and Thunder* is nothing short of spellbinding. I raced through it, eager to learn what happened to Bea and Livio. Ultimately, it's about choosing your own future and determining your own destiny. For those who haven't read the first book this still works as a standalone, although it will likely have you reaching for *We Are Blood and Thunder* as soon as you've put it down.

I defy any reader not to be bound to this story as surely as a mascherari mask to its owner or Livio to the stars.

Sasha Roth

Willow Wildthing and the Swamp Monster

Gill Lewis, pub. Oxford University Press

This story is about the adventures of Willow and her dog Sniff—a small and scruffy rescue dog with one eye, wonky teeth and a brave heart. Willow lives with her mum and dad and little brother Freddie. Her adventures take place in the wild woodland beyond her home. This is a great adventure story full of magic and secrets. The great thing is that adults cannot see the wilderness; everything is about the imagination of the children.

As soon as she crosses the river behind her garden Willow meets the wild children—Fox, Raven, Hare and Mouse—and her adventures begin. There is Green Slime River with flesh eating piranha fish and crocodiles waiting to eat children. ‘You won’t be anything but bones by the time they’ve finished with you.’ There are mountains, a misty bog, deep ravines and fast rivers. The young adventurers travel from the unexplored Forest of Forever Night to Dragon Gardens. They tackle the Valley of Killer Plants, with strange plants and huge leaves and they explore Skull Rock. They fight with the killer plants and are attacked by green tendrils and are bitten by razor sharp teeth.

As if the amazing and exciting encounters with nature are not enough, there is more. Is there a monster in the Wilderness? Is it a swamp monster? There is a huge walking mass, stinking of rotting plants and boiled cabbage with sludge-coloured eyes. There is also a witch, who lives in a hut in the woods. She is short and plump with wild, yellow hair. She can open magic doorways into other worlds. She can walk in steamy jungles and tread on frozen icebergs. She can use magic potions.

This story has everything. It is amazing and imaginative, helped by the stunning but simple illustrations by Rebecca Bagley. Friendship and kindness features and questions are asked. Little brother Freddie is in hospital and the wild children all send a nature gift for Willow to take to him. As Willow leaves the Wildthings, she asks. Who are they? Where do they live? When are they coming back? It had been scary for Willow to move to a different house in a different town, but she finds new friends and a new world to explore. She cannot wait to go back to the Wilderness and explore again.

Remember, the best adventures always have another adventure waiting at the end.

Gary Kemworthy

Wonderscape

Jennifer Bell, pub. Walker Books

While investigating some mysterious exploding garden gnomes on their way to school, Arthur, Ren and Cecily are sucked through a portal to another planet, 400 years in the future, and find themselves in the Wonderscape—an in-reality adventure game featuring famous historical characters.

As they play their way through the various realms, they must learn to conquer their own fears as well as their prejudices about each other so they can work together to find a way to escape and get back to

their own time. But behind the entertaining facade of the Wonderscape, there is something sinister going on—can Arthur, Ren and Cecily solve the mystery of the missing founder and help the others trapped in the game before their time runs out?

Wonderscape is a fun, fast-paced and immersive story, perfect for fans of the new Jumanji films and Anna James's Pages and Co. series. Jennifer Bell creates the sense of being in another dimension in a way that will appeal to gamers, but with real-life stakes. I particularly enjoyed the juxtaposition of the futuristic gaming-theme with the fascinating stories of real historical figures—some more obscure than others.

And I love the beautiful cover design by Paddy Donnelly—it perfectly encapsulates this thrilling world of imagination and possibility. Highly recommended.

Rebecca Rouillard

The Worst Class in the World

Joanna Nadin, illus. Rikin Parekh, pub. Bloomsbury Children's Books

The Worst Class in the World is a raucous, fast-paced, joy of a book, that if it doesn't get your child snorting before the turn of the first page, I will personally and LITERALLY eat my imaginary lockdown hat. Stanley Bradshaw and his hapless classmates from 4B, are frequently reminded by their frequently annoyed headmistress, Mrs Bottomly-Blunt, that they are LITERALLY the worst class in the world. For example, there was the time Penelope Potts the Playground Monitor, reported them all for trying to tunnel to Finland, and the time they went on a school trip to Grimley Zoo and Harvey Barlow smuggled a penguin back on the bus. And try as they might, class 4B certainly don't win any prizes, unlike the exemplary 4A led by class captain Eustace Troy, president of chess club, first violin in the school orchestra and team leader on the Shining Examples competitive spelling squad. 4B's class captain Bruce Bingley on the other hand, can amongst one thing, burp the national anthem. But Stanley Bradshaw is eternally optimistic, because according to his form teacher Mr Nidgett, everyone excels at something...they just have to look very hard to find it, and anyway Stanley usually has a FOOLPROOF (i.e., it will almost certainly go horribly wrong) PLAN up his sleeve, just in case.

The book features two madcap tales, *The Biscuit King* and *Show and Tell*. These are narrated by Stanley using the type of communication so beloved by children under the age of ten, i.e., a stream of consciousness. In *The Biscuit King*, Stanley and his best friend Manjit, determine on making their own special brand of Patented Manley Biscuits (half Manjit, half Stanley). A sure-fire way of excelling at something so even Mrs Bottomley-Blunt will be pleased. However, this sets off a biscuit king war amongst their classmates, resulting in a spectacularly vomitus conclusion.

In the second story, headmistress Mrs Bottomley-Blunt swoops into class 4B for a SURPRISE INSPECTION of their *Show and Tell*. Appalled by their feeble offerings (crisps are neither informative, interesting nor OUTSTANDING) she announces there will be a Grand Show and Tell during assembly the next day, against their rivals 4A, for which they had better up their game, because whoever wins will get a prize. This leads Stanley to wonder whether it will be the Joy of Winning again. What follows next has the beleaguered Mr Nidgett proclaiming that he will 'LITERALLY resign from teaching and become a lion tamer, because it cannot be harder than this'.

A story that marches to the beat of its own bonkers drum, *The Worst Class in the World* captures the chaos and excitement of primary school with touches of real heart. Its eccentric cast of characters are brought to life by the illustrations of Rikin Parekh, which crackle and fizz with punchy energy. This is a book that will excite children about reading and there's no higher praise than that. I have my fingers crossed that Joanna Nadin will bestow on us further adventures of the irrepressible class of 4B.

Highly recommended.

Matilde Sazio

Young Adult Book Reviews

A Kind of Spark

Elle McNicoll, pub. Knights Of

A Kind of Spark follows the experiences of Addie, an autistic girl living in a small Scottish village. She has twin older sisters: Keedie who is also neurodivergent and coping with the first year of university, and Nina who is neurotypical and vlogs about fashion.

Addie struggles with a new school year with a callous class teacher, a friendship betrayal and a new girl from London. Her class are studying the witch trials which took place in their small community and learn about the women who were killed because they were vulnerable or considered outsiders. Addie is transfixed by their story and begins a personal crusade to have the women's lives memorialised in the village. This is not the kind of history that the village wants to remember however, and she meets strong opposition as well as an unlikely source of support.

McNicoll calls this novel a love letter to neurodivergent children and small Scottish communities and it is beautifully written. Addie's experience of the everyday world is fascinating and enlightening. Readers cannot fail to warm to her enthusiasm, perception and humour in the midst of a large family. The relationship between the three sisters is engagingly complex and sympathetically illustrated. McNicoll evokes the small community of Juniper with its deeply kind individuals, insidious small prejudices and the interminable council meetings with sensitivity and insight. The parallel between the past and the present in how society treats those it perceives as different is persuasively drawn.

Written by an exciting new voice in children's fiction who is also a neurodivergent writer, *A Kind of Spark* is authentic, original and uplifting.

Saira Archer

Asking for a Friend

Kate Mallinder, pub. Firefly Press

Take three Year 11s from Manchester, who seem to have little in common apart from riding the same bus. Put them in a chintzy B&B in Weston-Super-Mare, and then wait to see what happens.

Each one is in distress. Agnes, who hates change, is missing her sister; Hattie's friends are ghosting her, and Jake has found a sinister lump. In their own ways, they are all friendless. Agnes hatches a plan to go and retrieve her sister and so the Easter holiday study break is conceived. It is a week that

will change their lives. This study break – Hattie and Jake take the ‘study’ part with a pinch of salt – gives them the opportunity to explore the qualities of true friendship.

I was initially a bit sceptical about the premise of these three disparate souls wanting to go away together but having accepted that they needed to be out of their comfort zones in order to see what they were really made of I eagerly followed their experiences. The language is straightforward and accessible. Although the characters are Year 11, I can see the novel being enjoyed by readers a few years younger as well. The issues they are facing are certainly not age-specific and readers are in safe hands with Kate Mallinder. She doesn’t, for one minute, underplay the anxiety of each of these life experiences. One of the aspects I liked most about the novel was the idea that we never know what is going on in someone else’s life and that we shouldn’t judge people’s problems on a sliding scale of severity: it isn’t a competition.

Agnes is as profoundly upset by her sister’s absence as her friends are by their troubles. It also struck me as an empathetic reminder that the stressful experience of GCSEs and the turmoil of personal problems aren’t mutually exclusive; many sixteen-year olds are grappling with both. Weston provides an appropriately changeable and stormy backdrop for these three to work through their problems and establish their friendship.

Spoiler alert! I think it’s worth mentioning that Jake fears he has testicular cancer and I applaud Kate Mallinder for the way she deals with the topic. She doesn’t shy away from his fear or embarrassment and, even more admirable, is that there isn’t a convenient narrative hiatus when he goes to the doctor: the reader is with him all the way. Knowledge dispels everybody’s worst fear.

If this all sounds very dark and intense, it isn’t. The tension is balanced with a lot of humour.

Clear-eyed and direct, Agnes is gifted with some satisfying and hilarious one-liners. I loved her fresh, original view of the world. Teenagers are going to have fun if they’re away on holiday, revision or no revision, problems or no problems, and these three are no exception. It is ultimately an uplifting, empowering novel about facing your fears and embracing true friendship.

Jackie Spink

Aurora Rising

Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff, pub. Rock the Boat

Auri is older than she looks. In fact two hundred and twenty years older after she was lost in the folds of space on the spaceship the Hadfield. She is the sole survivor of the ten thousand colonists that were onboard. No-one knows who she is. No-one knows what she has become.

The adventure begins with the formation of Squad 312, Aurora Legion's best misfits. The squad includes children of a great hero, Tyler, the hotshot captain and his twin sister, Scarlett, the diplomatic one. Their best friend Cat is the Ace piloting the spaceship. Finian, a Betraskan, is the tech wizard in an exo-skeleton. A Syldrathi named Kal provides security, barely able to control his volcanic temper. The science officer, Zila is at best a sociopath and at worst a psychopath. Their first assignment is a simple supply run of medical equipment to help Syldrathi refugees. The only danger seems to be each other. That is until they discover a stowaway: Auri.

Squad 312's blaze across the universe is full of exciting and desperate last stands, deadly games of cat and mouse across space, bar room brawls and masterminding the greatest galactic heist ever. The squad seem to catapult from one crisis into another. Meanwhile Auri seems to be the key to unlocking a conspiracy of cosmic proportion. As the mystery deepens, the squad spin blindly into a rabbit-hole of duplicity, not knowing who to trust and that includes Auri.

Each chapter of *Aurora Rising* is narrated from the perspective of a different character. Despite the disorientation early on, it soon became easy to switch perspectives. Interestingly the technique allows the reader to explore the foibles of each character and gain insight into their backstory. It also breaks up the narrative, creating tension in the story. Moreover, like a jigsaw, pieces cleverly come together as revealed by different characters across the whole book.

Aurora Rising is the first in the next best-selling trilogy of the phenomenal antipodean writing partnership of Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff. It is a great space adventure told with aplomb and lots of familiar tropes with twists for science fiction fans.

There are a few mild sexual suggestions and innuendo that puts this book in the mid- to older teen bracket.

Simon Barrett

Blood Moon

Lucy Cuthew, pub. Walker Books

An excellent book which I highly recommend. *Blood Moon* follows astronomy lover Frankie and her experience of period shaming. During her first sexual experience with Benjamin from her class, Frankie's period starts. They both agree it's only blood and it isn't an issue. The next day it is the talk of the school. Frankie believes Benjamin must have been bragging to his friends. Then a graphic meme goes viral turning their private intimate afternoon into something disgusting, mortifying and damaging. She blames her previously best friend, Harriet, as they recently had a falling out. The online shaming takes on a disturbing life of its own – the meme spreads to other schools, people in town recognise her, she is suspended from her part-time job at the planetarium and she starts to

receive abusive and threatening messages. Frankie does not know where to turn or who she can talk to.

The novel is Lucy Cuthe's debut and is written as a poem, which includes messages through social media between friends. There is a very powerful message to all about how people should not be made to feel ashamed of their bodies. I found myself laughing and crying along with Frankie as she attempts to navigate her way through the devastation to her life that follows this horrible act of cyber bullying. I particularly like the way Lucy puts dialogue and thoughts to the right of the page and friend's comments to the left and the way she uses onomatopoeic writing to give her words more depth. I also like the metaphor between the forecasted blood moon, which she plans to watch and the turn of events.

The characterisation portrays real teenagers, living very real lives. It shows how friendships can change and teenager's relationships with their parent's shift. In my opinion this book should be made essential reading for all pupils to highlight the effects and seriousness of online bullying and would be ideal for discussion in PSHE classes. I look forward to reading Lucy's next book.

Anita Loughrey

Reviewer's Website: www.anitaloughrey.com

Anita Loughrey's most recent books are a series of picture books based around the seasons, called *A Year in Nature*, published by Quarto and illustrated by Lucy Barnard. *Rabbit's Spring Gift* and *Frog's Summer Journey* were released on the 17th March 2020. *Squirrel's Autumn Puzzle* and *Fox's Winter Discovery* have been rescheduled to be released September 2021.

The Colours that Blind

Rutendo Tavengerwei, pub. Hot Key Books

Rutendo Tavengerwei lived and studied in Zimbabwe until the age of eighteen when she moved to South Africa to study law at the University of Witwatersrand. Subsequently, she studied at the World Trade Institute and worked at the World trade organisation in Geneva.

Her debut novel, *Hope is Our Only Wing*, was nominated for the CILIP Carnegie Medal in 2019. *The Colours that Blind* begins in the early 1970s and continues to 1980s Rhodesia before its incarnation as Zimbabwe. It is a story concerned with the violent prejudice experienced by the talented swimmer and albino boy Tumi and another teenage character Ambuya. The vivid 359 pages alternate their focus between these characters as they struggle to survive prejudice and random violence from their own people and the police.

The Rhodesian setting will be new to most YA readers, but the fluent, accessible prose combined with short chapters and the well-rounded depiction of the main protagonists should draw the reader in and

possibly inspire them to find out more about the history of Zimbabwe. There is a useful glossary of Zimbabwean vocabulary towards the end of the novel, which perhaps could have been more effectively included at the beginning of the novel to guide the reader. I did read this as a PDF and only encountered the brief but useful guide as I scrolled through the final pages, it may differ in the printed version. Immediately prior to this the author addresses her readers directly with an explanation of the context and theme of her novel. Again, this would make a useful Foreword. A highly recommended and thought-provoking read.

Trevor Arrowsmith

Deleted

Sylvia Hehir, pub. Garmoran

Already a winner in a New Writers competition with her first YA novel, Sylvia Hehir now gives us her second YA book, which itself has won a Scottish prize for its portrayal of the life of teenagers in a small, remote Scottish Western Highlands community.

After a traumatic break up with her long-term boyfriend Dee is left wondering how much worse her life can get. A handsome new boy in the village offers some hope but her friends are wary, and there seems to be a mystery in his life. Added to all this, her life would be a whole lot easier if her phone would stop playing up.

Dee is concerned that she is developing psychic powers – and there are others with second sight in the village, foreseeing things that have not yet happened, but which she then goes on to witness. Just as alarming, she also sees things which have already happened, which she didn't witness but which she had carelessly wished would happen. So, when she bins a friend's number on her phone, and that friend ends up in a rubbish bin, she's terrified that she somehow caused it to happen.

While we might fear that Hehir is just adding a supernatural element to her novel as an extra attraction for readers, in fact she is, in fact, showing us that adolescence is a time when all our senses seem on edge, and the inexplicable seems commonplace. Having lost her boyfriend to the girl she thinks she wished into the bin, Dee is eager to find a meaningful relationship, and Tom, the visitor in the village, seems to be just the person she needs. Neither she nor Tom, however, is an old hand at romance, and things don't go too smoothly, with Dee glad to discuss her worries with her faithful teddy bear!

There's also a family mystery involved, and the revival of an old feud in the village, both of which lead to violence but ultimately a resolution which is both personal and has wider repercussions.

Funny, insightful, fast-moving, sometimes scary but always an engaging read.

Bridget Carrington

Echo Mountain

Lauren Wolk, pub. Penguin

Echo Mountain is a sublime look at courage, determination and a fierce wildness within a young girl. Set in Maine, post-depression, this story follows Ellie and her family as they move from the town up to the mountains.

Ellie, her father and brother take to the wild easily and love nature, learning how to survive and thrive in their new home. Her mother and sister struggle. When an accident renders their father in a coma, the family must rally and work together even more. As Ellie helps her family with fishing, foraging and hunting, she finds incredible wood carvings waiting for her- small gifts meant just for her. They become special and she houses them together safely. While looking for more medicines and natural cures for her father, she comes across Cate, known as the Hag. She and her dog live at the top of the mountain and are struggling after an incident with a fisher cat.

Cate teaches Ellie new medicines and introduces her to the creator of the wooden carvings, Larkin. He lives on the other side of the mountain with his mother, who disapproves of both Cate and Ellie.

Larkin and Cate are both knowledgeable and share this with Ellie. In different times, Ellie may have aspired to be a doctor, however, women could not reach that goal yet. When Cate comes to live with Ellie and her family, small changes start to happen within. Relationships are brought closer together, trust is restored and healing begins to happen.

Echo Mountain is poetic and lyrical, with emotions and struggles written with such heart and soul that you feel immersed in the mountain and the lives of the families.

Erin Hamilton

Hello Now

Jenny Valentine, pub. Harper Collins

Mum has broken up with another boyfriend, mum and Jude are forced to move towns again. They move to mum's childhood home where she has happy memories. This time the town is full of elderly people and mum and Jude are forced to share a house with Henry Lake, a sitting tenant.

Then Jude meets Novo and instantly falls in love. Novo is magical, and Jude finds him so very handsome. Before too long Novo and Jude embark on an unbelievable adventure. An adventure that will change both of their lives forever.

This book is amazing, it's one that I had to read twice, the book never tells you if Jude is male or female, it's left to the reader to decide, but either way it doesn't matter. When I first read this book I assumed Jude was female, I don't know why, but the more I read the more I began to question that. After reading it for a second time I've decided that I really didn't know or care.

Jenny Valentine takes her reader on a journey with Jude and Novo, theirs is more than a teenage love story, it's a story of rebellion, of discovering who you actually are, of deciding what you want from life. It is also the story of the love that can grow between two people. Jude is the counterpart to mum – finding a love that will last yet this is not a soppy sentimental book but one that will grab its readers, make them think, make them question and help them to enjoy a great story well told.

I would recommend this book to teenagers aged 13 and above.

Helen Byles

Incendiary

Zoraida Córdova, pub. Hodder and Stoughton

I immensely enjoyed *Incendiary* by Zoraida Córdova, the first in her new *Hollow Crown* series. It is a clever, punchful, gory, passionate novel, aflame with desire and justice, as well as a wonderful creation of myth and history and a meditation on the nature of memory and identity. I was variously hooked by the plot and premise; surprised at twists and challenges in the journey; and impressed upon by the delicacy, sensuality, and bloodiness of the narrative.

As such, it has an amazing amount to offer a reader, much outside the remit of this review. I would like to emphasise that it seems to me a highly topical engagement, in that it centres on the resistance of the Moria, a people whose lands, cultures, and magical powers have been erased, colonized, and destroyed by King Fernando, the reigning King of Puerto Leones, in a fictional era echoing Inquisition-era Spain. Herself born in Ecuador and immigrant to the US, Córdova's novel pertinently connects us to the scapegoated and tortured 'heretics' of history and the indigenous peoples of the pre-colonial Americas, illuminating those fighting today – at a time when we are acutely witnessing a global call for the fall of colonial power, and the valuing of the lives of the long-oppressed.

Readers will be hooked into the adventure by the voice of Córdova's heroine and narrator, Renata Convida – a strategic, strong, and passionate fighter and lover. Orphaned from Moria parents, she was taken into the Kingdom's company; but, when she is rescued by the Moria in the famous

Whispers rebellion, her time in the palace incites mistrust in the Moria, amongst whom she must navigate feeling alone – but also deeply in love with her leader, Dez.

When Dez's arrest leads her unit back to the kingdom, her previous captor Justice Méndez has a second chance to provide the power-hungry King with her powers as a sought-after Róbari – blessed with one of the four Moria 'magics', stealing another's memory. From inside, she tactfully discovers the originary deception at the heart of the Kingdom, amongst a handful of colourful and humourous well-defined allies (the attendant Leo, elegant Lady Nuria) and set in vivid, medievaesque scenes.

As such, truth precedes the Kingdom's peace, and the unfolding of the self holds the key to the Morias' collective struggle to assert their own truth. A meditation on the powerful hold of myth and memory, that sustain our views of the world and ourselves, Córdova's novel is a testament to the quality of memories, their suppression or rewriting – and, not least, to the author's attempt to capture its silvery, slippery essence in language: this is a novel in which 'memories [... form] and re-form like ink in water', or '[undulate] like light on water'.

I look forward to the next installment in 2021.

Laurence William Tidy

Last Lesson

James Goodhand, pub. Penguin Random House

Ollie-Walley Combes is having a bad Year 11 at his London comprehensive school. His straight A-graded mock exams and accomplished pianist skills are not helping. They are part of the problem as is his supportive Gramps with whom he lives. They are responsible for his not fitting in. Peer Nate and his mates incessantly bully and prank Ollie and threaten to incinerate Gramps, pouring accelerant through his letter box on a regular basis. Only girlfriend Sophie understands Ollie has issues.

What is the last lesson? The first-person narration reveals Ollie's fears and his determination to remove any further threat by deploying a homemade pipe bomb. Some YA readers may find the relentless angst too much, whilst others may appreciate this account of bullying and mental illness. Is Ollie's violent action justified given his mental anguish? He is aware that his actions will make him a murderer, but such is his mental torment and tunnel vision, that this seems the only way to reduce his suffering. In the reflective final section, he acknowledges: "I was dangerous because I thought I was fine." Ollie is failed by his teachers and even Gramps. These key adults see only a partial version of Ollie and fail to address his central mental problems.

The language and pace draw the reader in, as does the frank account of contemporary adolescent life including the presence of pornography and its impact on relationships. But the central question about

the acceptability of Ollie's resorting to violence is left for the reader to process. As a set text there should be opportunity for discussion of this key issue, but a solitary reader could be misled.

Trevor Arrowsmith

Love on the Main Stage

S.A. Domingo, pub. Hachette Children's Books

16-year-old songwriter Nova thinks she's found The One. Step forward Nate, popular star of the rugby team and a young Jason Momoa-lookalike. He's a seemingly perfect hunk, that is, until he cheats on Nova with the not so pleasant Amanda and as a result breaks Nova's heart.

Devastated and determined to have a boy free, stress free summer, Nova joins her parents on the festival circuit (first stop Island Rocks) helping them out on their West African-Caribbean fusion food truck, Eats & Beats. But when she meets Sam, an aspiring musician from Miami, with looks to die for, Nova's best intentions begin to unravel against the charms of the decidedly smitten American boy. He invites her to an open mic session and performs a song that is clearly all about her. Who could possibly resist that?

Encouraged by her best friend Gemma, Nova spends her last evening at the festival in the arms of Sam. But as they walk back to her tent after a magical night of dancing, Nova is reminded of her promise to avoid any chance of heartbreak. She runs into the crowd leaving behind a dejected Sam. Has she done the right thing? The Fates decide for her when he shows up at the next festival. And as Nova finds herself falling for Sam, she wonders why is it that he's so reluctant to introduce her to his father, and just who is Miami Belinda, and WHY is she leaving messages on Sam's Instagram, asking him to sing her to sleep?! Is history repeating itself?

S.A. Domingo is a writer who is known for adult romances under the name Sareeta Domingo. She has contributed to publications including gal-dem, Stylist and Token Magazine, and has taken part in events for Hachette Books, Winchester Writers' Festival, Black Girls Book Club and Bare Lit Festival among others. *Love on the Main Stage* is her second novel for Young Adults, and is a gently paced clean teen romance. If your teenagers are missing the festival circuit this year, this uplifting story about love, friendship and following your dreams, will serve them as a welcome reminder, of the best of life pre lockdown. For if ever there was a time to delight into escapism, it's now.

Matilde Sazio

Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know

Samira Ahmed, pub. Atom

In this profoundly rich and riveting tale of two young Muslim women from different centuries and continents, Samira Ahmed has beautifully woven together two unforgettable narratives in a thought-provoking literary mystery set to uncover a voice that has been silenced throughout history. Set in the heart of picturesque Paris, aspiring art historian Khayyam finds herself swept up in an investigation with a charming young Parisian – who happens to be a distant relative of the legendary novelist Alexandre Dumas – to uncover the mysterious woman who served as an inspiring yet voiceless muse for the great French novelist Alexandre Dumas, French artist Eugene Delacroix and English poet Lord Byron.

Parallel to Khayyam's narrative is the story of this mysterious woman, Leila – a 19th century Muslim woman, living as a harem in the Ottoman Empire. Suppressed and silenced, Leila reveals her heartbreaking fight to keep her true love hidden from her jealous captor and how her survival becomes interlaced with the lives of Dumas, Delacroix and Bryon.

Intricately rooted in 19th century art and literature, *Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know* is a passionate and inspiring story of destiny, heritage and history, with a heartfelt devotion to the women whose stories have been erased from the pages of history. Despite having no knowledge in art history, I still found Ahmed's narrative profoundly enlightening, and, above all else, entertaining. The overarching academic mystery was impressively well-researched, and the enticing trails of clues were skilfully plotted, creating a seamless blurring of fact and fiction. Whilst the addition of a teenage romance gently braided into the beautiful backdrop of the city of lights – a setting so elegantly brought to life through Ahmed's descriptive and vibrant prose – kept the narrative refreshingly light and inviting.

A must read for fans of historical and literary fiction, *Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know* will sweep you across time to hidden histories and unheard voices.

Fern Tolley

Melt my Heart

Bethany Rutter, pub. Macmillan

A feel-good YA book that addresses issues of body image and identity with humour, insight and psychological depth. Bethany Rutter is a journalist and blogger who writes about fat bodies, plus size fashion and body politics including the benefits and limitations of body positivity.

Melt My Heart is Bethany's second YA novel and like her first, *No Big Deal*, beneath a funny story lies a serious, inspiring message for readers, be they plus size or not.

Rutter is an influencer, an editor and a fierce UK voice in the debate around body positivity. Her main character, Lily Rose, tells her own story, and we find that she is used to people paying attention not to her, but to her gorgeous twin sister, Daisy. But even though Lily loves her own fat body, she can't shake off the idea that no one would ever choose her over Daisy – not when they could have the thin twin. Then she meets Cal, the gorgeous, sweet guy from New Zealand who can't seem to stay away from her.

But Daisy has a secret summer crush, and Lily becomes increasingly afraid that the subject of that crush is Cal. To complicate matters Lily can't figure out why she isn't head-over-heels in love with him, not missing time from her job at the ice-cream shack with her life-long best friend, Cassie. She wonders what Cassie is getting up to with Cal's friend Jack, and what she's thinking about when they're alone. While struggling to make head or tail of her sexual orientation, Lily is also struggling with the approach of leaving for university, away from home, from her sister and, crucially, from Cassie. She faces all these dilemmas, each additionally impinging on her self-image and mental health.

Ultimately she resolves her conflicts, and faces a different future, supported by family and friends, and realises that she does not need to be bound by the expectations and opinions of others.

Lily is a very likable character, and this is an inspiring, hopeful read for teenage girls, who can take reassurance from the positive outcomes she achieves.

Bridget Carrington

Song Beneath the Tides

Beverley Birch, pub. Guppy Books

Song Beneath the Tides by Beverley Birch, presents a thrilling and exciting new story for YA readers. Birch creates a rich tapestry of love, mystery and adventure within the novel, which proves for an extremely engaging read.

The dual narrative used by Birch intertwines the present day, which is told through the eyes of the two central characters, Ally and Leli, and the past, which is written in the style of a journal. With evocative and gripping descriptions of their blossoming romance, it is hard not to become fully invested in Ally and Leli's relationship and the haunting adventure they take together. Their connection and battles they face binds these two characters, creating suspense and gripping scenes throughout- perfect for early teen readers!

Woven in with the mystery and romance, Birch also provides thought provoking and relevant societal messages within the novel. History crosses with modern politics as alongside Ally, a sensitive and

informative telling of the colonial history of the East African coast is given, which will undeniably stick with you. Beverley Birch spent her childhood exploring her home in East Africa and so it is no surprise that the landscape of the novel and her knowledge of the culture is so beautifully told.

Not only does Birch capture the reader's imagination, but also confronts serious themes of today and history which are essential for young people to learn about. This powerful story of two teenagers and their struggle to defend their home, is an enchanting, tense read that is not to go unnoticed!

Jemima Henderson

Wonderland

Juno Dawson, pub. Quercus

For once, the publisher's blurb doesn't exaggerate: 'NOT SUITABLE FOR YOUNGER READERS. A searing exploration of mental health, gender and privilege... What happens when you fall down the rabbit hole? Alice lives in a world of stifling privilege and luxury – but none of it means anything when your own head plays tricks on your reality.

When her troubled friend Bunny goes missing, Alice becomes obsessed with finding her. On the trail of her last movements, Alice discovers a mysterious invitation to 'Wonderland': the party to end all parties – three days of hedonistic excess to which only the elite are welcome. Will she find Bunny there? Or is this really a case of finding herself? Because Alice has secrets of her own, and ruthless socialite queen Paisley Hart is determined to uncover them, whatever it takes. Alice is all alone, miles from home, and now she has a new enemy 'who wants her head.'

Two of Juno Dawson's previous novels, *Clean* and *Meat Market*, were based on other aspects of late teenage/early 20s worlds, and the dilemmas raised by compliance with those world's expectations. In these, together with *Wonderland*, Dawson has produced a trilogy of novels linked by the author's close and well-informed examination of these influences on self-image and mental health.

Alice has struggled with her gender allocation since pre-puberty, and since then has been in the process of transitioning, a process which is not yet complete and still leaves her with many uncertainties about her relationships.

Dawson knows her character's conflict from experience, and we feel great sympathy for Alice, and empathy with her struggles. While we often focus on poverty and the resulting vulnerability, Alice's world shows us that the other end of society is equally damaging to mental health and possibly offers even greater opportunity for self-image to fall apart.

Quite apart from these aspects of Dawson's novel, her recreation and interrogation of Wonderland, with references both explicit and implicit to Dodgson's endlessly puzzling fantasy world, should stand with the very best of those works which attempt to unravel its meaning. Not to be missed by 17+s.

Bridget Carrington

Non-fiction Book Reviews

100 Children's Books that Inspire Our World

Colin Salter, ed. Hetty Hopkinson, pub. Pavilion Books

The first impression made by this book is as a very handsome object: solidly made, well designed and illustrated in full colour. It might be called a coffee-table book, except that it is far more interesting and informative than most books in that category, certainly for lovers of children's literature.

Salter's 100 choices are given chronologically, each being afforded a double-page spread with information about book and author, a reproduction of the cover (usually the first edition) and inset pictures. The 100 books of the title are supplemented by a list of fifty near-misses, given rather shorter shrift in an appendix. Anyone might spend a few happy hours reading this book through, but it is perhaps more likely to be used for dipping, or as a quick reference. (I have not spotted any serious errors, other than two concerning the name of Diana Wynne Jones, once referred to as Wynn in the text and later incorrectly indexed under 'W' rather than 'J.')

Each author is rationed to one book, but in some cases (J. K. Rowling, Lemony Snicket) the rules are bent to allow in a whole series, while in others (C. S. Lewis, Joan Aiken) this option is not taken.

Anyone reviewing such a book is inevitably going to wonder about the basis of selection. Which books were included, which omitted? Who is the 'we' in the 'our world' of the title? And what kind of inspiration is being referred to? Is this a list of classic books? Popular books? Prizewinning books? Ground-breaking books?

The answer, as provided in the Introduction, is disarmingly simple. These are the personal favourites of the author, his family and friends, and the staff at Pavilion, augmented by an attempt not to leave out obvious classics. In this, the writer and his team were largely successful, although a few omissions dazzle (how did *Tom's Midnight Garden* fail to make the cut?). This is a solidly canonical list, albeit with a pronounced Anglo-American emphasis (more than half are British). Some European classics turn up early on, but there are no books from the last 60 years written in any language other than English.

Of the titles that are included, most are well-known books of deserved repute – plus one or two surprises, such as Alan Aldridge's and William Plomer's now-obscure *The Butterfly Ball* and the *Grasshopper's Feast* (1973). YA titles may be a little thin on the ground (no *The Outsiders*, *Annie on my Mind*, *Junk* or *Noughts and Crosses*, for example), but there is a strong representation of picture books and humorous books, categories are too often underrepresented in lists of children's classics.

Catherine Butler

A Climate in Chaos

Neal Layton, pub. Hachette Children's Books

I'm sure you have heard of climate change and greenhouse gases, but do you actually know what these words mean? I'll be honest I struggled to explain it to my son.

So let's start with climate change, I always thought it meant the change in the weather, was I right - well sort of, weather can change in a few hours and affect several parts of the country but climate change affects the whole planet and it takes many years to change.

4.5 billion years ago when the world was first formed it was HOT, but slowly it started to cool down oceans and land began to appear, life began to flourish. Now we come to the science part, we need oxygen to breathe but we breathe out carbon dioxide (I did know this), we need plants to take in the carbon dioxide and release oxygen (are you still with me?). Now on to the greenhouse gases - the carbon dioxide that isn't taken in by the plants travels up in the sky to join the other gases keeping the planet hot, like a duvet cover wrapped round the planet. All this would be fine if it wasn't for us, humans.

When we started burning petrol and coal we added to the greenhouse gases, then we started letting off methane (this is caused by farming cows and taking rubbish to the tip.) To make matters worse we started to cut the trees down.

So back to climate change, the answer to what it is, is hotter temperatures, more droughts, bigger storm's, heavier rainfall, and the changes to animals' habitats.

What can we do to change this? This excellent book will help you to understand.

This book is an excellent resource for describing climate change to children of all ages, the pictures are brilliantly drawn and have so much detail in them. The first section of the book is all about climate change and its causes. The second section is full of things we can change ourselves and ideas about how we can encourage others to change their habits too.

The pictures are fantastic, packed with information. In summary a brilliant book for children of any age who want to learn about climate change.

Helen Byles

Backward Science

Clive Gifford, illus. Anne Wilson, pub. QED

As I drew this book from its package, I felt a tingle of anticipation. Could this title be that rarest of things, a factual book about science and technology designed to appeal to both boys and girls? Would I give this present to both my nephew and niece (8 and 9 respectively) without reservation? The answer is a definite and delighted 'Yes.'

The author's success in revealing what life was like before world-changing discoveries embraces a simple but clever idea to work backwards from our present. Children have very little understanding of time as it progresses forwards through history, relating far better to the recent past when their mother was a young woman, or their grandfather a little boy. Each double page describes 'Life before...' moving on to four short pieces describing a scientific discovery or invention, a biography, "How it works" and its impact on daily life. The presentation of the information is clear, restrained, covering every sphere of human activity: farming, war, medicine, transport, industry and the domestic.

With pointers as to what drives technological innovation whether it be military or economic advantage, earlier versions of what we would call globalisation, or sheer curiosity. Frustration at the inadequacy of servants is a new one on me!

Importantly, the author has taken trouble to make sure that female and BAME scientists are represented (as are the larger contributions of other cultures). This, along with the excellent illustrations marks it out as one of a new generation of books that aims to cross gender (and other) divides.

The pictures are key to the success of this book. They lie neatly between the graphic and realistic and convey so much more than the science; the grind of daily life for women, the fury of the blast furnace, or the tedium of the scriptorium. They are original and modern in style and gently humorous without being trivial. Architecture, clothes and social interactions all convey the wider historical context. I particularly liked the vignette of a rather supercilious male boss dictating to his attractive and acquiescent female secretary (1970s). Such richness ensures this book's appeal to all children.

I have some questions: Should the book have been called Backward Technology? -more accurate - if less appealing. Is the Hoover a world changing invention? Would it not be more consistent for the timeline at the end to have run backwards in time? With regard to factual accuracy: I would like to have seen Marie Curie acknowledged as a Polish/French scientist. Minor gripes; they should not detract unduly from this wonderfully attractive and engaging book for children between the ages of 7-11.

Katherine Wilson

Be Plastic Clever

Amy and Ella Meek, illus. Sarah Goodreau, pub. Dorling Kindersley

Amy and Ella Meek are sisters, teenage activists and the founders of the charity “Kids Against Plastic”. In this book they detail the history of plastic, explain about the different types of plastic in use and the problems they cause, the what and how of recycling these, and the impact of plastic pollution worldwide.

There’s also a section dedicated to how you can make a change – in your homes and schools, locally and globally - as well as how to become an activist if you want to make a difference.

The book has been sustainably produced and is written in a very accessible format with lots of fun black and white illustrations. It contains a huge amount of facts and information that will both fascinate and horrify, such as bio-plastics, often sold as environmentally-friendly, are actually super hard to dispose of. There are lots of inspirational quotes, pages on environmental heroes such as Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough, as well as interviews with people involved in the fight against plastic pollution.

Although aimed at 8 – 12-year-olds, this book could also be read with younger children.

Barbara Band

Economics for Beginners

Laura Bryan and Andy Prentice, illus. Federico Mariani, pub. Usborne

Economics for Beginners is a comprehensive book on microeconomics and macroeconomics, the management of a whole economy as well as international trade.

The chapters on microeconomics examines the decisions of individual economic agents. It begins by introducing the basic economic problem, before exploring the notion of markets and how a rational, fully informed economic human supposedly makes choices. The book continues to explore the economic behaviour of individual businesses: why businesses exist and how they function. The second half of the book focuses on macroeconomics, including the different economic systems and the important role of governments.

Economics for Beginners clearly communicates economic theory, sometimes using simplified scenarios that enables readers to grasp the then more complex world of today. For example, the authors explain the basic economic problem by travelling back in time to show one prehistoric family’s fight for survival. This simple scenario explains important economic concepts of the supply of scarce resources, the demand for their use and the opportunity cost of how they are used. This is an important foundation for the rest of the book. Elsewhere simple scenarios are effectively used to clearly explain important economic ideas and theories, such as two women on a desert island explaining comparative advantage, the basis for international trade. There are however many

examples illustrating economic theory throughout the book allowing readers to appreciate the diversity of economic behaviour. The selection of examples includes many that children and young people will relate to and experience from for instance the market trading collector's cards in the school playground to less familiar situations of stock market trading. The book continually makes powerful connections between economic ideas and everyday economic activity.

The writing is engaging and clear, introducing lots of economic language in an accessible way. The illustrations by Federico Mariani are appealing and combined with the text, highly instructive. It is therefore a fantastic book for young readers, who are unlikely to have had any formal economic learning at school and therefore completely new to the subject. There is however great depth to the book. This is particularly evident in the last chapter of the book, exploring even broader applications of economics to issues of environmentalism, conflict and space exploration.

In addition, *Economics for Beginners* is supported by Usborne's Quicklinks, a range of internet resources helping readers explore economics further. Many of these excellent links are to specifically designed primary and secondary educational packages by central banks. There are also some economic games and activities, such as a Space Trader game for primary children and a Monetary Policy Game aimed at secondary schools.

Economics for Beginners invites young minds to see the world anew, transforming their understanding of their own and others economic behaviour.

Simon Barrett

Every Second

Bruno Gibert, pub. What on Earth Publishing

'Every second, every minute, every hour, every day, every year, so many things happen around the world.'

Across our planet, every second, 1 wedding is celebrated, 2,050 chicks hatch from their eggs and 9,200 kilograms of poo are made by humans. *Every Second* is a book filled with incredible, illuminating, illustrated statistics. Designed to help us consider the impact of human behaviour and better understand the world we live in, this collection of info-graphics is ideal for curious youngsters.

Statistics range from the seemingly light-hearted every second '8,000 scoops of ice cream are eaten' to '485 trees are cut down and 158 are replanted'. No comments are made on the facts included, yet strong political and environmental themes emerge from the comparisons the reader is invited to make. We learn that every second, £700 is invested in humanitarian aid and £46,760 is spent on arms

and weapons. The careful placements of these shocking statistics encourage powerful questions and discussions – especially when shared with children.

Every Second appeals on a visual as well as informative level. Gibert has used a stylish colour palette and bold, graphic illustrations to add punch to the, at times uncomfortable, facts included. As you'd expect from a text published by What on Earth Books, this is a thought-provoking picture book for a more enlightened generation.

Abby Mellor

The Farm That Feeds Us

Nancy Castaldo, illus. Ginnie Hsu, pub. Words and Pictures

The Farm That Feeds Us takes the reader through a year in the life of an organic farm, a journey through the seasons and rhythm of farm life.

This is a simplistic view of a small sustainable farm; modern farms are, perhaps, not quite like this, but it provides a good introduction and raises several points that could lead to further discussion such as connecting with the community, food distribution and responsible farming.

The illustrations, in gentle muted colours, are detailed and the pages are packed with information. Children can learn about different breeds of farm animals such as pigs, cows and sheep as well as other animals often found on farms like horses and goats.

There is information about farm machinery, natural pest control, farmers' markets and county shows as well as snippets of science in the form of photosynthesis and pollination.

Although aimed at 7 – 11 years, this would be a good book to share with younger children as well as use in a classroom situation. A simple glossary explains some of the terms used, I would have liked to have seen an index too to make searching for specific topics easier.

Barbara Band

Get Ahead in Chemistry from the Periodic Table to the Apocalypse

Tom Whipple, Illus. James Davies, pub. Walker Books

Get Ahead in Chemistry is not a textbook, your teacher probably hands them out at the start of a lesson. Neither is it a revision guide. Your school probably produced a list of revision guides you could

buy at the start of your GCSEs. It is, according to Tom Whipple, an assistant, sitting alongside the textbook and revision guide, ready to read.

Get Ahead in Chemistry is superb. Tom Whipple, science editor at The Times, has teamed up with illustrator James Davies to communicate a clear narrative about GCSE Chemistry with great humour and memorable, real-life applications of chemistry to help consolidate knowledge gained in the classroom and independent study. The book is well structured, beginning with an in-depth explanation of the atom, the basic 'brick' to use Tom Whipple's word, that is central to understanding the later chapters on different chemical reactions. The final chapter goes global: the chemistry of the changing Earth's atmosphere. Each chapter starts with a break-down of the topic and a reflection on the importance of this knowledge. The main text itself is usefully divided into a number of sub-headings and accompanied by numerous illustrations by James Davies, including annotated diagrams and artwork developing Tom Whipple's funny, and at times, zany extrapolation of chemical knowledge.

This book will help students retain knowledge. The humour and the sometimes bizarre real-life cases are more than a hook to encourage students to continue reading and learning, but a hook to also remember that learning. The book's success however is advocating why chemistry matters. There is substory throughout the book of Clare, a chemistry nerd, travelling back in time and using her knowledge of chemistry to take over the world! Whilst this might be a Chemist secret desire, this flight of fancy shows how important chemistry has been to human development. From making fire, firing pots, growing pots, washing, drinking, cooking and keeping food fresh to gunpowder plots, can all be explained by chemistry. It is often the case that students are more likely to put effort into subjects they see are relevant.

Although originally released to support students sitting exams in summer 2020, this book should be a staple for every student starting GCSE Science. It provides the big picture, not only of key concepts, but why it is worthwhile to study Chemistry.

Simon Barrett

Invisible Nature A Secret World Beyond our Senses

Catherine Barr, illus. Anne Wilson, pub. Otter-Barry Books

Invisible Nature a Secret World Beyond our Senses is an illustrated children's book to explain the hidden forces of sight, sound, touch and smell that lie beyond our senses – but affect our lives - and are used by many different kinds of animal. It is a fact-based book with lots of illustrations to back up the facts and information. The book starts off with the Big Bang and then goes through a discovery to the natural powers of animals and how people have learned to use them.

Reading the book there were lots of interesting facts that an adult will learn from as well as the children. It is fascinating to read how animals use their senses and interact with each other and the world. The facts could open up to further discussion and questions from your child. As it is a fact-based book it does not have to be read all at once (as there are 40 pages) and will be very helpful if any of your children have schoolwork on any of these subjects. This subject is clearly explained in a fun way using the lives of animals to explain the subjects with lots of illustrations.

Francesca Jones

Marvellous Magicians

Lydia Corry, pub. Thames and Hudson

Marvellous Magicians takes the reader on a tour of the history of magic and illusion via biographies of several famous magicians.

We begin with the art of illusion 5000 years ago and learn about the first automatons before entering the worlds of Jean Eugène Robert Houdin, the Father of Modern Magic; Richard Potter, the Emperor of Conjurors; Harry Kellar, the Dean of Magic; Adelaide Herrmann, the Queen of Magic; Ehrich Weiss aka Harry Houdini, the Handcuff King; Howard Thurston, the King of Cards; and more.

The magicians featured are worldwide and diverse. There are pull-out spreads and the pages are filled with details including a short biography of the person, an explanation of their top trick and other amazing facts about them. We learn about the magician's toolbox, the art of the magician's assistant and the magician's code of keeping secrets. There's also advice on how to become a magician today.

This visually stunning book, that is a mix of history and biography, is filled with vibrant illustrations that evoke the excitement of the magician's world - children are fascinated by magic tricks and this book is one that is sure to delight them.

Barbara Band

Nature's Light Spectacular

Katy Flint, illus. Cornelia Li, pub. Wide Eyed Children's Books

Once long ago, an aspirational civil servant wrote that teachers should aim to inspire a 'sense of awe' in their lessons. The sentiment is without doubt a noble one; but was sadly lost in translation as teachers planned meticulously to include at least a three-minute period of AWE within any 30-minute session. Largely due to well-meaning misinterpretation, awe was killed stone dead.

Because awe doesn't really work like that. Really good awe (although that's probably tautological – you can't have mediocre awe) comes from nowhere, hits you like a freight train and leaves you reeling. And that's what Katy Flint is aiming for in this book.

Nature's Light Spectacular provides young readers with a whistle stop tour of nature's most amazing events, without getting bogged down in the detail. The message is, quite simply, LOOK! This is INCREDIBLE! TOP NOW AND REVEL IN THE SHEER WONDER OF NATURE! The book features 12 lavish double page spreads which illustrate meteor showers, glowworm caves, blood moons and lesser known phenomena such as the firefall at Yosemite, California. Each page has a cogent, clear explanation of what's going on, which is just enough to place events in their context, but not so much as to dilute the emotional impact with heavy detail. After all, if you're not inspired to start with, you're probably not going to bother to find out more anyway.

You could read this book with tiny children – simply to revel in the colours and images. It lends itself to step by step discovery over a number of years, and could remain of value to young secondary school children who may start to explore the events it describes in more detail. It's a beautiful book, illustrated with a contagious enthusiasm for the wonders it portrays. It's awe in print: to be enjoyed spontaneously and unreservedly.

Laura Myatt

Philosophy for Beginners

Jordan Akpojaro, Rachel Firth and Minna Lacey, illus. Nick Radford, pub. Usborne

Philosophy for Beginners asks BIG questions about you and me, life and the universe in an accessible and comprehensive book on philosophy.

The concept of a BIG question is well-established in the UK education curriculum and the point of entry for many non-fiction books. The nature of BIG questions, illustrated with many varied examples of BIG questions, is explained in the introduction, some of which will be familiar to readers with a prior philosophical interest. The ambitious breadth however of this Usborne's book is remarkable. It includes chapters on epistemology, metaphysics, religion, mind, ethics, aesthetics, political theory, and logic and language, primarily from a western philosophical perspective, but including some eastern philosophy. The book also introduces how to do philosophy as well as learning about philosophy.

Each chapter is substantial, clearly explaining the main philosophical concerns, contributions and concepts. Unbelievably all this is squeezed onto a format of only twelve pages! There is therefore a lot of information to digest and discuss further. Clever design by Freya Harrison separates out sections in each chapter, making the text easier to read. (In addition, her choice of blocks of pastel colours

helps unify the whole book.) Moreover, Nick Radford's illustrations powerfully add to the explanation, using dialogues, comic strips or juxtapositions showing alternative possibilities to demonstrate philosophical points. So, children who have more experience, perhaps of philosophy taught in school, or reading widely on the subject will enjoy and benefit from this book.

Moreover, the Usborne's Quicklinks are excellent with material suitable for primary and secondary children. The links are to mostly well-regarded institutions, including the Open University, BBC, and TED-Ed as well as a number of independent productions of a good quality. There are also some fun games, such as Quandary, testing your role as a spaceship captain to solve the dilemmas of a new colony.

Usborne's books continue to be authoritative. Dr Alex Kaiserman of Oxford university, who teaches extensively across philosophy, was consulted on this specific publication.

The title *Philosophy for Beginners* understates this fantastic book, yes for beginners new to philosophy, yes for readers with more philosophical knowledge, and yes for teachers like me teaching philosophy.

Simon Barrett

The Secret Life of Trees

Moira Butterfield, illus. Vivian Mineker, pub. Words & Pictures

The Secret Life of Trees is a hard-back educational story book about the life cycle of trees. My first impressions were very good. It is a large hardback so it feels nice and weighty in my hands, but not too heavy that a child couldn't carry it. The cover features a lovely illustration of a tree along with some cute animals, and although the illustration isn't particularly eye-catching, it has a shiny, embossed accent which really takes the quality to another level.

Upon opening the book, the first few pages are all solid colour as opposed to the default white. This makes me think that more care and attention has been put into making the book and as I start to turn the pages, I am impressed with the texture and feel. They are thick and matt which feels nice and would probably last through quite a few reads.

There is a content page giving me a hint that it is quite lengthy. In fact, I found the book was quite a bit longer than expected, almost thought it was too long. The words were extremely detailed, but I think it could have gotten away with omitting some of the content as I had a general feeling of slight boredom as I got toward the end of the book. I think that I would consider reading the book in stages if I was reading to a child. As the tree talks about different stages in life, it almost has a 'mini' story in each stage. In this way, it could be possible to read each stage or chapter at a time, and not even in the

same order to make it easier to keep a child's attention. My initial reaction is to dislike how it breaks the rules of consistency like this, but setting itself out from the crowd like this is what seems to make this particular book work.

The book packs in facts and educational information from the point of view of a tree. The tree 'speaks' to the reader, taking them through its life cycle and that of its inhabitants. This works really well, and the addition of the very cute animals makes it more fun to read than just information about trees. The illustrations are cute and suitably 'natural' in colour and style. The text is broken into paragraphs dotted about the page between spot illustrations. This is good to break-up the rather large amount of text, but it got a bit confusing at times, with me reading the text in the wrong order or missing a paragraph completely. On some of the pages I faced some very large blocks of text and was put off immediately. Despite being very well written and charming, the pages which featured less text just seemed to work better.

It is a collection of short stories, albeit with a running theme, but this is not mentioned anywhere on the outside of the book and I was actually pretty surprised with what was inside. It is by no means a disappointment, but I would have liked to have seen something on the cover that hinted at the practical guide inside. Another point would to have had the main character as a tree on the cover too. There are a few human characters who are featured throughout the book. I was pleased to find a good example of diversity in gender, race and age. The stories were from different countries all around the world, it was a nice touch to see their origins listed. I didn't really find any of the stories that outstanding, they were merely a means to explain the tree's story which took centre stage. Some of the people were illustrated so small that they felt like they had been squeezed in around the real reason for the book; the facts.

The facts on each page remind me of an encyclopaedia – they are well presented with bullet illustrations and in some cases numbered or with an accompanying diagram. I could imagine getting 'lost' in the book and studying it over and over. It was quite a lot of information to take in on one read even for an adult so I could imagine a child, even an older child, struggling with the barrage of school-like information. I fear kids might view it as a chore to read rather than fun. Although there are some activities that families could take part in in the real world. Activities like planting trees and other eco-friendly interactions.

Getting toward the middle of the book I hadn't tired of the lovely illustrations. Some of them spanning a double page spread and some taking a rollercoaster ride around the text. Each turn of the page offered something different and creative, it was interesting to see what would appear next! As each chapter passed, the main tree got older until toward the end of the book he appears old and wise. A nice touch.

There is a lot packed into *The Secret Life of Trees* and after reading it all I would describe it as a 'bumper guide to trees' – there was so much inside, that it was too much to tackle in one go and would

have to be split in several readings and re-readings. It is a well-made book that holds a lot of information. This would be an excellent addition to a school or children's club, with its educational approach and interactive format, but for home reading, I can't see it being a favourite due to its lack of fun and silliness. Sometimes simple can be better.

Izzy Bean

The Tale of a Toothbrush

M G Leonard, illus. Daniel Rieley, pub. Walker Books

When Sofia is allowed to choose a new toothbrush, she picks a sunshine yellow one, names him Sammy and puts an S on the handle. However, one day Sofia's mum sees the bristles are worn and puts Sammy in the bin.

The story follows Sammy's journey as he's taken on a ship full of rubbish to a hot place and how he tries to get back to Sofia with the help of a rat, a plastic bottle, some stars and an albatross. When he finally finds his way home and Sofia's mum says she can't use him to brush her teeth, Sofia isn't worried as she has lots of ideas for how he can be useful.

This book sends a message about recycling and reuse, highlights the issues around rubbish and the impact on wildlife as well as the environment, all wrapped up within a delightful story.

The illustrations are bright, cheerful and amusing – Sammy with his rather funky bristle hairstyle is particularly endearing – and there's some information at the end of the book about the problems with plastic with the suggestion of using a bamboo toothbrush instead.

Barbara Band

When Darwin Sailed the Sea

David Long, illus. Sam Kalda, pub. Wide Eyed Editions

A narrative non-fiction book that details the story of Darwin's life, from his childhood in Shropshire when he was brought up by his sisters after his mother died to the publication of his theory of natural selection that caused a furore and divided opinion.

In this biography the reader learns that Darwin failed to become a doctor or clergyman, both ambitions of his father; that he tended to avoid lectures, preferring to be outside in the natural world; and that at the age of 22 years he joined the Beagle on her second voyage. This was due to be a journey of 2 years – the ship finally returned after 5 years of sailing to South America, South Africa and

Australia. During the journey, Darwin collected specimens and kept scientific journals which he wrote up on his return.

This is a fascinating and interesting introduction to Darwin's life and his theory of evolution. Combining history, science, travel and adventure, the book is lavishly illustrated and also contains information about some of Darwin's discoveries as well as the people who helped shape him. There is a small glossary and a timeline.

Barbara Band

World of Wonder: Mountains

Charlotte Guillain, illus. Chris Maddon, pub. Words and Pictures

Mountains form the backbones of the continents and this book takes you on a round-the-world tour from the Himalayas and Alps to the Andes and Rockies with specific mountains featured including the Matterhorn, Everest, Mauna Kea and Mount Fuji.

It looks at how different types of mountains, such as upthrust, fold and volcanic, are formed and there are descriptions of the habitats found on mountains from the lowland slopes to the peaks. Wildlife is included - insects, birds, reptiles and mammals – as well as features such as fractured ice, snowslides and icefields. The book also dips into river formation, mountain lakes and waterfalls.

The illustrations are quite graphic in style and their cool colours evoke the feeling of wide-open spaces. Information is presented in short blocks of text making this book accessible to 8 – 12-year-olds.

It is also full of interesting gems such as the fact that Nanga Parbat in the Himalayas is still growing at the rate of 7mm per year. A further resources list with both books and websites listed will enable any reader to explore the topic in more detail.

Barbara Band

Bethany Rutter writes ...

Before summer 2016, I had not written a word of fiction since I was at school. But when I was approached by Rachel, my editor at Macmillan, who asked if I wrote fiction, or if I didn't, would I be interested in doing so, I leapt at the chance. And the question I asked myself in putting together *No Big Deal* was 'if I only ever tell one story, what's the story that I want to tell?' The story, for me, is always about the relationship between people and their bodies, and how that ripples outwards to their relationships with friends, family, lovers, crushes, strangers.

When I was growing up, I didn't feel well-represented in fiction, whether that was books, film, TV, theatre. I was fat, definitely bigger than my peers, and struggled with the clash between my inherent self-esteem and the fatphobic world I was living in. I found no reinforcement in fiction. No backup. So over time, I became my own backup, and with the advent of social media, found my people in the form of fat-positive and body-positive social media accounts and fellow bloggers. It was when I found people with bodies like mine, heard their stories, found a place to discuss our wins and failures, the complicated feelings and experiences that come from having a body that doesn't fit with a conventional standard of beauty, that I felt at home in the world.

It's been such a huge honour to be able to take the platform that I developed through social media and blogging, and turn it into fiction for young people. To know the conversations we have as plus size women, to recall the comments I've received, to be sure of the experiences that shaped me, and make that into something as lasting and permanent as a book. I want, more than anything, for young people to feel seen, and heard, and maybe most importantly of all, taken seriously. 'The fat character' is so often used for comedic effect, grotesque and only semi-human, certainly not desirable, popular, intelligent or cool. That's why it's felt so incredible to be able to create fat characters that have agency, who can express all the complicated and difficult parts of being a teenage girl in a way that feels truthful to the experience that I had, at least. To be able to translate some of the solidarity and support I've found through the fat positive community into fiction will, I hope, make someone, somewhere feel a little less alone.

It's a level of responsibility I take seriously, because I know how powerful it would have been for me to read something like *Dumplin'* by Julie Murphy as a teenager rather than a woman in my twenties. I can't ever take for granted the amazing gift of writing for young people, whether the message that 'you deserve to be happy in the body you have' only lasts the length of the book or is a thought that stays with them beyond the final page.

Article writer by **Bethany Rutter**, arranged by Armadillo's **Bridget Carrington**

Melt My Heart by Bethany Rutter is published by Macmillan Children's Books..

Books in uncertain times

During times of uncertainty, feeling worried or anxious is natural. For young children, who are less resilient than adults and will have fewer coping strategies, these concerns may cause an increase in stress resulting in disturbed sleep, poor appetite and tearfulness. Publishers have been quick to produce e-books to help explain coronavirus and the steps people are taking to stay healthy in a safe, clear and instructive format to reassure children.

Andersen Press have released a free eBook, created by author Sally Nicholls and illustrator Viviane Schwarz; *Staying Home* is available to everyone now as a download from the Andersen Press website as part of their continued effort to entertain and occupy children and their parents during lockdown: https://www.andersenpress.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2020/04/STAYING_HOME_medium-res.pdf

In *Staying Home* a family of energetic raccoons are going through a day in lockdown, no school, nursery or work – and explaining to the youngest members of the family how they’re doing their part to save lives just by staying at home! Charlie Sheppard, Publishing Director and Sally’s editor at Andersen Press said of the collaboration, “We love Sally’s books, and are proud to work with her on her fiction and picture book titles – when she suggested this we leapt at the chance to do something that might help stave off boredom for families out there in the middle of lockdown. The chance to also work with Viviane made the book irresistible. We hope through our channels we can share the experience of *Staying Home* with young families everywhere.”

Author Sally Nicholls has said of the project, “Like many authors, I’ve been finding it hard to concentrate on writing projects. My husband and I are at home at the moment with two children aged four and two, and I wanted to write something which reflected their new lives. The day-in-the-life format is a very familiar one in picture books. Like most stories for young children, this one is somewhat idealised - there’s no sense that the family are worried about money and the parents are remarkably patient. But it does contain more screen time and fighting than you’ll find in most examples of the genre. I love Viviane’s warm, energetic raccoon family. They’re making the absolute best of a difficult situation, and they’re doing it with affection and good humour. I can only hope I’m managing half as well!”

Illustrator Viviane Schwarz added, “I was busy working on a book that I am writing myself - a book about feelings and worries, and I was feeling rather worried and stuck myself, seeing the trouble to come. So when Sally mentioned that she felt the need to write a book about what family life might be like right now, I said I would illustrate it, and as fast as I could. We considered making it a cosy bear family, but then decided that the family would be raccoons instead because we both like them. Also,

it's quite easy for bears to hibernate, they're used to it. Raccoons are a lot more lively! - After a day of scribbling I suddenly realised that in German a raccoon is called "Waschbär", a wash-bear, because they wash their food. I watched a lot of videos of them splashing around in the water, and it helped with the bathroom scenes. Wash your hands like raccoons, stay in and be kind to one another.

Other resources that can be used with young children to talk about staying at home and keeping healthy include:

Coronavirus: A Book For Children written by Elizabeth Jenner, Kate Wilson and Nia Roberts, illustrated by Axel Scheffler, and published by Nosy Crow. This is a non-fiction book that explains clearly and succinctly what coronavirus is, what happens if you catch it, and how we can all help stay safe and healthy.

Winnie and Wilbur Stay At Home by Valerie Thomas and Korby Paul, and published by Oxford University Press. This delightful tale features the loveable duo having fun by keeping fit and baking. The illustrations are full of detail and the book features lots of rainbows.

Oxford University Press have also published *Everybody Worries* by Jon Burgerman, a picture book for young children who are worried about coronavirus that explains how everyone worries but sharing our worries and showing our feelings can make us feel better.

For adults, the NHS has some advice regarding how to help your child if they are anxious, the British Psychological Society has published some tips on how to talk to children about illness and Young Minds, a mental health charity, has some guidance on how to support your child's mental health during the pandemic.

Article by **Barbara Band**
School Library Consultant

Following the Bear for 40 years

Working as a children's bookseller in 1980, it was very exciting to be at the start of an amazing 40-year journey by Walker Books, a still wholly independent publisher founded by Sebastian Walker. Helen Oxenbury's baby board books, among the first titles, went on to become firm family favourites with nieces, nephews and my own children. I'm delighted I can now introduce my small granddaughter to the wonderful array of Walker books.

Jane Winterbotham, Walker Books Publishing Director writes:

"From Walker Books' start in Sebastian Walker's home 40 years ago to the busy Vauxhall offices now, Walker has been making books that children will want to read again and again: *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, *Maisy*, *Where's Wally?*, *Owl Babies*, *Five Minutes' Peace* and *Guess How Much I Love You* are just some of the classic picture books that established Walker Books' reputation for quality and genuine child appeal. *Guess How Much I Love You*, which marks its 25th anniversary this year, has alone sold over 47 million copies worldwide, making it one of the most successful children's books ever."

Forty years on, Walker continues to attract the best talent to the list and to work to reflect all readers in our books, with exciting newcomers Angie Thomas, Galdem and Sophia Thakur headlining our lists in recent years. In 2020, authors Atinuke, Mac Barnett, Smriti Prasad-Halls, Ben Bailey Smith, Maya Leonard and Maggie O'Farrell, and illustrators Jon Klassen, Jarvis, Jaime Kim, Yasmin Ismail, Ben Mantle, Sav Aykuz and Petr Horacek represent the wide diversity of creative talent in our picture books. Books matter, as they can help to give a child the confidence to be themselves as seen in Jessica Love's *Julian Is a Mermaid*, a joyful celebration of self-expression: this October we look forward to its happy sequel, *Julian at the Wedding*.

Meanwhile, the Walker candle burns brightly over the fiction list. Twenty years ago, Anthony Horowitz blazed a trail with the first Alex Rider story, *Stormbreaker*, kicking off the series that got a whole generation of readers into books. Now the teen super spy is back in a thrilling new adventure, *Nightshade*, the 13th book in the series. For younger readers, two new sparky heroines are bursting onto the scene – small but mighty *Too Small Tola* from Atinuke and illustrator Onyinye Iwu, followed in the autumn by Sona Sharma, *Very Big Sister* by Chitra Soundar, illustrated by Jen Khatun. At middle-grade, Thomas Taylor follows up the huge success of *Malamander* with *Gargantis*, and Joseph Coelho's hilarious *Zombierella* kicks off 'Fairytale Gone Bad', illustrated by Freya Hartas. For older readers award-winning Patrick Ness takes us into a world of cults and dragons in *Burn*, while Neal Shusterman tackles mental illness in *Challenger Deep*.

Walker's *Read and Wonder* series pioneered narrative non-fiction in the 90s. *Grow*, a picture book

exploration of DNA by Nicola Davies and Emily Sutton, continues that tradition, while cycling Olympian Chris Hoy's *Be Amazing!* will be an inspiration to all young readers with the message that nothing is impossible.

Finally, Michael Rosen, one of Walker Books' best-loved authors, joins fellow former Children's Laureates in two stunning new collections: *On the Move*, powerful poems about migration, with drawings by Quentin Blake; and *Honey For You, Honey For Me*, a first book of nursery rhymes, exuberantly illustrated by Chris Riddell. What better way to celebrate 40 years of children's books!

Walker Books and the School Library Association

As part of the celebrations to mark this significant anniversary, Walker Books are funding 40 memberships for schools of the School Library Association.

From the SLA website:

Karen Lotz, Walker Group MD, said: "For forty years, we at Walker have aspired to create a nurturing environment where our authors and illustrators can feel valued and inspired to create their very best work. We pride ourselves on the quality of the list our creators have produced and on the integrity of the program's conception and execution, from editing and design to manufacturing.

The most critical step, however, is getting the right book to the right child at the right time. We are deeply aware of the profound role that a school librarian has in building a safe environment and curating a high-quality collection where each child is able to discover a love of reading for themselves. In recognition of your invaluable partnership with Walker over the decades, and as a way of thanking the library and educator community, Walker Books are delighted to sponsor 40 free memberships to the School Library Association for one year. We really value everything you do and hope that this gesture allows 40 schools and numerous children to benefit from the many resources that this wonderful institution provides to its members."

SLA CEO Alison Tarrant said: "It's a wonderful birthday gift from Walker; and a lovely way for them to show their appreciation for all the brilliant work that school library staff do. We work to ensure every school is supported in their use of the school library and all the amazing work and activities which that encapsulates. This illustration of appreciation for the important work of school library staff is particularly appreciated during these uncertain times."

Applications closed on 12th June and I'm sure there is much anticipation amongst those waiting to hear if they will be one of the lucky ones!

Article by **Jayne Gould**

Happy Birthday!

There are several significant book birthdays to celebrate this year. From iconic picture books to the world's strongest girl and a trail-blazing teenage spy, join us in wishing them all a happy birthday!

Pippi Longstocking celebrating 75 years

2020 marks 75 years since the publication of Sweden's most famous literary export, Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking, in 1945. Nine-year-old Pippi – originally created by the author for her daughter during the dark days of World War Two – was a new kind of children's character: a free-spirited girl with superhuman strength who uses a powerful mix of anti-authoritarian thinking and kindness to challenge the status quo and to bring joy to the lives of those around her.

The iconic redhead has become a role model for generations, and an international bestseller – the Pippi Longstocking stories are amongst the most translated children's books in the world, with over 70 million copies sold in 70 languages. She is regularly picked as a favourite children's character and famous names to have been inspired by her include Michelle Obama, Lady Gaga, Cerys Matthews and even Stieg Larsson, who admitted his character Lisbeth Salander (*The Millennium Trilogy*) was directly influenced by Lindgren's creation.

Oxford University Press, Lindgren's long-term UK publisher will release six new, highly-illustrated editions of the Pippi stories during 2020: two chapter books, *Meet Pippi Longstocking* and *Pippi Longstocking and the Snirkle Hunt* (March 2020), featuring artwork from the original illustrator, Ingrid Vang Nyman; *Pippi Longstocking*, *Pippi Longstocking Goes Aboard* and *Pippi Longstocking in the South Seas* (May 2020), with black and white illustrations by Mini Grey, and a hardback gift edition of *Pippi Longstocking Goes Aboard* (October 2020), illustrated in full colour by former Waterstones Children's Laureate, Lauren Child.

Not Now Bernard celebrating 40 years

David McKee, Andersen Press

David McKee's tale of a young boy who meets a monster in the back garden, has been enthralling and surprising children since it first appeared in 1980. With its surprise ending, this is a story which can be interpreted in many different ways, but one message doesn't change – that we need to listen to our children. The anniversary paperback edition features comments from Michael Rosen and others. As part of the celebrations, Andersen Press has donated to Action for Children to support the charity's

vital work and make sure every young person has a safe and happy childhood

***One World* celebrating 30 years**
Michael Foreman Andersen Press

A book which is as relevant today as it was when it was published 30 years ago, *One World* celebrates the natural wonders of our planet, explores the ravages that humans have inflicted upon it and how we protect it. The brother and sister who see a reflection of our world in a rockpool, realise that other children will help.

***Guess How Much I Love You* celebrating 25 years**
Sam McBratney and Anita Jeram, Walker Books

Celebrating 25 years of loving you to the moon and back, Big Nutbrown Hare and Little Nutbrown Hare have delighted families worldwide. Heartwarming and delightful, this is an utterly captivating story of love and how to measure those big feelings. A sequel, *Will You Be My Friend?*, featuring the original characters and a new one, will be published in September.

***Stormbreaker* celebrating 20 years**
Anthony Horowitz, Walker Books

A special anniversary edition of the adrenaline filled novel which launched the adventures of teenage spy Alex Rider was published earlier this year. Fourteen-year-old Alex is forcibly recruited into MI6. Armed with secret gadgets, he is sent to investigate Herod Sayle, a man who is offering state-of-the-art Stormbreaker computers to every school in the country. But the teenage spy soon finds himself in mortal danger. His missions have continued, with the latest, *Nightshade*, published in April.

***Hug* celebrating 20 years**
Jez Alborough, Walker Books

Ever feel like you need a hug? A really big hug from someone who loves you? That's how Bobo, the little chimp feels. Walking through the jungle he passes lots of creatures enjoying a cuddle together: elephants, chameleons, lions, giraffes, hippos – even the snakes have got someone special to squeeze. But poor Bobo is alone. Will he ever find the hug he needs? Using only three words throughout the book, this simple, endearing story is told through gorgeous, detailed artwork. The special 20th anniversary board book edition features a new introduction from Jez Alborough.

***Dogs Don't Do Ballet* celebrating 10 years**

Sara Ogilvie and Anna Kemp, Simon and Schuster

Ten years ago a new artistic collaboration was born, between Sara Ogilvie and Anna Kemp, with the creation of Biff, who is no ordinary dog. He doesn't do dog stuff like peeing on lampposts, scratching his fleas or drinking out of toilets. If you throw him a stick, he'll just look at you like you're crazy. No, Biff is no ordinary dog. Biff likes music and moonlight and walking on his tiptoes. You see, Biff doesn't think he's a dog, Biff thinks he's a ballerina, which is all very well . . . but dogs don't do ballet – do they? The 10th anniversary edition features a sparkly cover and new artwork, showing “What Biff Did Next”.

***Hugless Douglas* celebrating 10 years**

David Melling, Hachette Children's Books

Also in search of a hug is Douglas, whose quest for the perfect bear hug has been delighting young readers for 10 years. The new edition features a gold cover and a special red balloon.

Article by **Jayne Gould**

Puffin celebrates 80 years

Eighty years ago, during World War II, Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin, wanted to provide books to support evacuated children adjust to country life. These non-fiction titles, such as *War on Land* by James Holland were so successful that a year later, they were followed by four story books, including *Worzel Gummidge*.

Legendary editor Kaye Webb, founded the Puffin Club in 1967, which grew to have 200,000 members. In 1978, the Puffin Time Capsule was buried, containing a copy of *Gobbolino the Witch's Cat* by Ursula Moray Williams. The message she wrote inside will be read for the first time when the capsule is dug up in 2078!

Those original four books have since been followed by some of the most iconic and classic titles and authors in the children's book world, including work by ten Children's Laureates. Puffin is internationally recognised for books such as Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* and Roald Dahl's *The BFG*; established contemporary authors, including Jacqueline Wilson and Jeff Kinney (whose *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is the biggest-selling children's book globally); and is home to talented new voices, such as Tom Fletcher, Nadia Shireen, Vashti Harrison, Robin Stevens and Sam Copeland. Much like their mission during World War II, in 2020, Puffin aims to make books as accessible to as many children as possible during the COVID-19 outbreak.

With the world again facing unprecedented circumstances, schools closed and children being home schooled, Puffin are again offering support, albeit in very different ways. These range from online storytimes to podcasts, working with BBC Bitesize and a restructured Puffin Schools website. The centrepiece is the **Puffin Festival of Big Dreams**. This was held over the week of 8 to 14th June, in partnership with Waterstones, with over 250,000 people tuning in.

Hosted each day by Blue Peter presenter Radzi Chinyanganya, multi-talented authors and illustrators, inspired children to make puppet theatres, investigate their family history and try out their own sketches after viewing virtual drawing contests. Every event aimed to leave children with an idea to try out and keep their imaginations dreaming long after screen-time was over.

Festival highlights included:

- Jeff Kinney offered a 'Wimpy Kid' Studio Tour, whilst Jacqueline Wilson read 'The Worst Thing about My Sister,' as voted for by viewers
- Robin Stevens ran a live and interactive mystery making workshop
- Lucy Hawking hosted an intergalactic-ly awesome space quiz
- Nathan Bryon and Dapo Adeola organised the first ever 'Rocket Draw-Along', whilst Carrie Hope Fletcher and Rashmi Sirdeshpande offered special readings

- Illustrator Nick Sharratt got into the festival spirit by listening to viewers' dreams and making them come true! Spectacular creations included a marshmallow bed, a sloth dinner party and a house made of cheese!
- A 'birds eye view' of the Coquet Island Puffins with the RSPB and the announcement of the Puffin and National Book Tokens Big Dreamers Writing Prize

Each day, children were invited to submit their own dreams to the festival, for the chance to have their dream turned into an illustration by Nick Sharratt. Three dreams were drawn every day and were assembled into The Puffin Collage of Big Dreams, to show just how amazing the viewers' imaginations are. Over 500 hundred dreams were submitted in total throughout the week, from houses of cheese to karate champions, edible books and sloths at the dinner table - proving that children's imaginations are unstoppable.

All 12 of the Puffin Festival of Big Dream events are available to watch again on Puffin's YouTube (@PuffinBooks1) and Facebook (@PuffinBooks) channels and at www.puffin.co.uk/DreamBig

Francesca Dow, Managing Director of Puffin since 2002 said: "Never have stories and the power of the imagination been so important, than in this time of enforced isolation. A book, a story, can help children escape their kitchen or their bedroom and explore new worlds of adventure, make them laugh, introduce them to new friends, learn about the world beyond their four walls, during school, bookshop and library closures. We know how much joy reading can bring and that's why Puffin will do everything to ensure that children have all they need during this time to continue in their discovery and love and sharing of books, and to Dream Big."

The Puffin Book of Big Dreams

A collection of stories to mark Puffin's 80th birthday and embodies Puffin's past, present and future, bursting with over 40 new and imaginative stories, poems and illustrations from a diverse range of beloved Puffin authors and illustrators old and new. You'll also find an assortment of carefully curated classic family favourites to rediscover. From caveman-inventors to genius chickens, magical phoenixes to cheesy elephants and environmental clear-ups to the Notting Hill Carnival, the amazing stories and poems featured in *The Puffin Book of Big Dreams* all tackle the theme of dreaming big. Some of these dreams are big, some small, some are wild and fantastical, and some are full of love, hope and kindness.

Article by **Jayne Gould**

Puffin is celebrating 80 years of inspiring children to dream big in 2020 with a variety of activities, initiatives and publishing, including the release of *The Puffin Book of Big Dreams*, out now. For further details please visit www.puffin.co.uk/DreamBig and follow Puffin's social channels for regular updates: Twitter/Facebook: @PuffinBooks | Instagram: @puffinbooksuk | #PuffinDreamer.

Interview: Jack Meggitt-Phillips

I saw a tantalising thread about a new book from Egmont about a Beast with a recommendation “The biggest and beastliest middle grade series since Lemony Snicket”. Being a huge fan of *The Series of Unfortunate Events*, my curiosity was peaked and I emailed begging for a copy of *The Beast and the Bethany* by Jack Meggitt-Phillips to be sent my way. Luckily for me, the lovely folk at Egmont were keen to shout about this book from the rooftops and my request was granted.

A completely delightful and dark book that will enchant, scare and enthrall you!

An opportunity to interview Jack was presented and with no hesitation, I drafted my questions, sent them away and waited with baited breath for the return. They are even better than I could have hoped and Jack’s signature humour is thrumming in each answer.

Can you describe *The Beast and the Bethany* in a couple of sentences? It’s a children’s book about a beast, a youthful 511-year-old, and a child who’s about to be eaten. Ebenezer Tweezer keeps a beast in the attic of his mansion, who he feeds all manner of things (performing monkeys, pet cats, the occasional cactus), and in return the beast vomits out presents for Ebenezer, as well as potions which keep him young and beautiful.

The beast grows ever greedier, and soon, only a nice juicy child will do, however, the child Ebenezer chooses is a rebellious prankster – one who’ll be a lot trickier to get into the beast’s belly than any cactus or pet cat. Enter Bethany...

What might be next for Ebenezer, Beast and Bethany? Obviously without spoiling what is set to be a series... The series is essentially going to be about two misguided people trying, and miserably failing to become do-gooders. All whilst saving themselves and their friends from the beast’s dastardly, bone-crunching villainy.

Ebenezer is eccentric and fascinating? Is he based on anyone in your life? He’s based on a version of myself which has much better hair, but much worse morals.

Sadly, I have no magical beast to vomit me out potions or presents, and, even on my worse days, I’ve never considered serving up a child as a snotty snack for any carnivorous creature. However, I do share Ebenezer’s obsession with peculiar teas, questionable outfits, and avoiding wrinkles.

What is your writing process like? Do you have a special place to write? I write pretty much exclusively in my dressing gown – a charming, stripy number that frankly deserves a ‘co-

authored by' credit.

I also ransom my morning pain aux chocolate from myself until I've written 50 lines. Sometimes entire days are lost to hunger, and I can be found crawling to the kitchen in the late evening after I've finally finished the 50th line.

Writing is clearly a gift of yours, but what might you have chosen to do if you couldn't be an author/writer? I come from a deeply unpractical family who thought that in order to support the writing, I should have a sensible back up option - AKA a hitherto useless qualification to teach and offer health and safety advice to disco dancers of all ages.

If you ever injure yourself in a sequin related accident, or an over-energetic step-ball-change, then I'm your man. Please don't come to me with any medical related emergencies outside the field of disco dance - I've had to have that conversation too many times before.

What tips would you offer to budding writers? Probably the most useful thing I've learned is how to look at plot and story as different things. Plot is what happens, and story is what the book is actually about.

For instance, in *Christmas Carol*, the plot is all the ghostly visitations, whilst the story is about a man changing his ways and rediscovering what it means to live.

And in *The Beast and The Bethany*, it may seem as if the book is a horrifying tale of a beast devouring its meals, but in reality it's about . . . no, that's pretty much it, actually.

Rumour has it you have a wardrobe full of fascinating items...What are your favourite items and least favourites? Where is this love of clothes inspired from? My Nan is my fashion icon. We're terrible influences on each other, and we keep on enabling each other's ill-advised purchases. I never truly feel comfortable wearing a garment unless it's going to raise at least half a dozen sets of eyebrows, whereas she isn't going to so much try an item of clothing on unless it has 2,000 sequins sewn into it.

My most fashionable item would have to be one of my suits - likely a rather dashing burgundy three-piece that was acquired just before Christmas. The least fashionable would have to be one of my four hats - I look terrible in all of them, but I just won't accept that I'm simply not a hat person.

What was your favourite childhood book? If it were not for a certain Mr Snicket, it's likely that I would have never taken to reading, let alone writing. His books are dripping with misery, woe, and sheer terror - all the essential ingredients needed to captivate children, and show them that reading can be as exhilarating as the most dangerous and ill-tested of rollercoasters.

What are you currently reading? My New Year's resolution for 2020 was to read some books that have been published this century, and I've failed miserably. I'm something of a Victorian addict, and I'm currently gasping under the gaslights in horror at *The Island of Dr Moreau*.

Jack Meggitt-Phillips is clearly a character to contend with and I laughed each time I read and re-read his answers. This series is set to be huge and I am already the biggest fan! *The Beast and the Bethany* is due to be published on 3rd September 2020 by Egmont. Please read my review of this AMAZING book in Junior reviews.

Article and interview by **Erin Hamilton**.

Interview: Emma Rea

Rebecca Rouillard spoke to Emma Rea about the inspiration behind the characters and setting of her new book, *My Name is River*.

I clearly remember reading about the Amazon Rainforest in primary school and being equally fascinated and terrified—are there any particular books that made you want to write about the Amazon?

I'd slightly tied my hands in *Top Dog*, the prequel to *My Name is River*, by mentioning that Floyd's dad had moved to Brazil. So when thinking of how I could write a longer, more adventurous sequel, Brazil was an obvious choice and the Amazon rainforest an easy leap from there. The intoxicating memory of Eva Ibbotson's wonderful books *Journey to the River Sea* and *A Company of Swans* meant the exotic setting was already alluring and felt possible to me. Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*, and those boys' adventures on the Mississippi, were also lurking in my imagination, urging me onwards.

Tell me about your research, you actually went to Manaus and travelled up the Amazon river—what was that experience like?

I was lucky enough to be able to travel with my family to Manaus and right up the Amazon river to stay in a simple floating hotel run by indigenous people. Going with my children meant that I was able to use their experiences: my son did actually feed a leaf into a piranha's snapping mouth and hold it up afterwards, with the teeth marks showing. We spent a morning with a fisherman in his dugout canoe and caught piranha in exactly the way it's described in the book. And I was amazed when our guide showed us how he could communicate with his village by whacking a particular tree trunk with a stick, and how he could grunt so that caiman (Amazonian alligators) would grunt back at him. I had already done a great deal of research - read books, magazine articles, watched films, but I didn't feel 'fluent' in describing the rainforest until I had actually been myself. Funnily enough someone had breezily said, early on in the writing of this book, that I should do a research trip, and I dismissed the idea as ridiculous. But the seed had been sown...

Without giving away any spoilers, there is a significant digger in this story, and your Twitter bio describes you as an ex tractor driver – do you have a particular interest in farm machinery?

Ha! I loved my two summers driving tractors and grain lorries on a farm in Hampshire during uni holidays, but I had forgotten all about that when I started writing the book. I was gripped to hear that our young neighbour in Wales drove his grandfather's digger - that's what gave me the idea. It was only afterwards that I remembered that I'd loved it too. Come to think of it, I'd love to drive a digger

or tractor again once in a while. There's something elemental and calming about it.

I love the way Dylan describes the characters he meets by identifying the substances that run in their veins. How did you arrive at that idea? How would Dylan describe you?

The idea for the fact that Dylan sees what runs in people's veins came to me in the Museum of Modern Art in Machynlleth. There was a glass sculpture which looked like ice, and the moment I saw it, I knew Dylan would think of Floyd if he saw it. At first the idea was only that he should sense what flowed in Floyd's veins, then I saw that it could be something he sensed about everyone. What would he see in my veins? A great question! The only way I could ever meet Dylan would be if I was doing an author visit to his school, and I have a suspicion he would be looking out of the window, thinking about building his treehouse, rather than listening. But my daughter said I had cauliflower cheese sauce running through my veins, and I'd like to think he would agree.

Your portrayal of Lucia, a street child living in a Manaus favela, was informed by a true story—can you tell me about that?

I was nervous of writing about a street child without any knowledge of the hardship and danger they face. I asked our guide in Salvador - a man who had grown up in the communities - whether my idea for a girl who taught herself English from a thesaurus she found in the dump was absurd, and he told me about *Child of the Dark*, the diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus, published in the fifties in Sao Paulo. In her diaries she describes how, in order to keep herself and her three children alive, she scavenged scraps of paper and metal from the gutter to sell. Despite ever-present hunger and worry, she was an acute observer of the poverty, violence and desperation in her community. The publication of her diaries and their success allowed her to leave their cardboard and wooden shack and buy a real house.

An important message of your book is environmental conservation—is this something particularly close to your heart? Do you feel hopeful that the next generation will look after the world better than we have?

I wanted *My Name is River* to awaken an interest and love of the rainforest in children, so that when they're older they will have a clear picture of it and possibly feel moved to action. We flew from Manaus to Tefe for an hour and I didn't take my eye off the window for the whole flight. We were lucky to see completely unspoilt rainforest - not a road or building or a single gap in the thick green carpet of trees. But great tracts of it are being lost and I found it unbearable to read about the forest fires in Brazil last summer, and how they threaten the livelihoods of indigenous people.

Do you have a favourite river, or one you're particularly keen to visit in future?

My favourite river is the Dovey, which flows through Machynlleth towards the lovely seaside town of

Aberdovey, in Powys. There's a swimming spot on it which is heaven on earth: cold, clear water, rounded stones and the shade of trees. Swimming there is the high point of every summer.

Do you have an equally exotic location in mind for your next book?

I've just finished writing a story about Thomas (from Aberdovey) who accidentally finds himself on an art trip to Venice. But I've also got ideas for an adventure in Ethiopia, and a story set in Portugal in the fifties.

Article by **Rebecca Rouillard**

Interview: Kate Mallinder

Q & A with Kate Mallinder, author of *Asking for a Friend*.

Kate, thank you very much for agreeing to do this Q&A for Armadillo.

Starting with questions specifically about *Asking for a Friend*... Agnes, Hattie and Jake are in the final throes of revision for their GCSEs. Why did you choose to set the novel during this time?

Sitting GCSEs is one of those rites of passage and so the run up to them can have teenagers digging deep and asking themselves big life questions as they realise adulthood isn't too far away which makes it rich with story potential. Of course 2020 has been the exception, and I feel for all those teens who aren't getting to sit theirs this year. It must be heart-breaking not to have all those 'end of an era' milestones.

The three friends take a trip to Weston-Super-Mare, for a week of 'revision.' How important is it to your writing to get your characters out of their normal environment?

It's really important! When you take characters away from their normal, it also takes them away from their support networks meaning characters have to learn to negotiate situations on their own. This is when they find out who they truly are and where it gets interesting as a reader. Once away do they decide they're someone different? Do they re-invent themselves or do they start to feel really comfortable with who they are? It's fascinating for me as the writer too, as sometimes a character surprises me!

Agnes, Hattie and Jake were purely friends. However, I'm thinking that I can't be the only one who detected glimmers of romantic potential between Hattie and Jake. Could you tell us why you kept romance off the radar, and whether there is any possibility of a sequel?

That's so interesting you spotted this! I did toy with the idea of having something romantic between Hattie and Jake, but quickly decided that it would alter the friendship dynamics too much. I think for teens, while romance is important, often friendships are the most significant relationships they have.

A few more general questions ...

Who do you have in mind as your audience when you write?

I primarily write for young people aged 11-15 years old, though I know lots of young-at-heart adults

enjoy my books too. I parent teens, I run a youth club and I love doing school visits; so I feel qualified to say teenagers are absolutely amazing. They are inquisitive, open-minded and a joy to be around and it is both a massive privilege and a huge responsibility to write for them.

What kind of books do you like reading and are there any YA authors you particularly enjoy?

I totally followed the advice of writing what I love reading, so I devour contemporary, upbeat YA fiction from Chloe Seager, Katy Birchall, Simon James Green, Alexandra Sheppard and Lucy Powrie, though I also love Sue Wallman for thrillers, Holly Jackson for murders and Gabriel Dylan for when I want to be terrified!

What are you working on next?

I've got several ideas all at various stages, an outline of another feel-good story and I'm part way through something a bit different as part of a Masters. There's no shortage of ideas, just a shortage of time!

Questions by **Jackie Spink**.

Interview: Ziggy Hanaor

Cicada Books is an award winning independent publisher based in London, UK. Specializing in stunning and unique books for children, including activity books, picture and non-fiction, their books are highly sought and convey wonderful messages. The illustrations in each book are beautifully chosen and have a huge impact on the story or information within the pages. I was so pleased to be given the opportunity to send some questions to Ziggy Hanaor, the Managing Director of Cicada Books.

Ziggy's responses are fantastic and provide a proper insight into the publishing world of Cicada Books and their upcoming titles. I have been lucky enough in the past to be sent some of their books to read and review and I can highly recommend them all. Ziggy uses the following three words to describe Cicada Books, "Handsome, Subversive and Engaging".

Learning about indie publishers is fascinating as they need to think differently to the larger publishers, offer more unique books and be aware of their brand as they look at submissions, authors and illustrators. Asking Ziggy about 'standing out from the crowd', she had this to say,

"I don't think it's a conscious decision to stand out from the crowd. I really love edgy, emerging illustration styles, and I'm always on the lookout for illustrators that have a very distinctive voice. Once we've found a way of working together, the books stand out quite naturally because they don't look like the other books on the shelves. Also, we work with some great printers, and we spend a lot of time thinking about how the books will feel, so hopefully that helps them to stand out too."

As a smaller publisher, Ziggy and Cicada Books choose to publish 10-12 books each year and I was curious about the number of submissions they receive and how they make those all-important decisions about what to publish. "Submissions seem to come in waves, but we usually get two or three per week. I will always look at the stuff that comes through and try to respond (though it does get busy, so sometimes I don't). It's hard to say what I'm looking for. I think if you look at the Cicada website, there is an aesthetic that comes through. Even though the illustrators are all working in different mediums with very different voices, there is a certain approach, which is non-traditional, edgy, but also warm and humorous that they all share. That's what I'm looking for, and although that sounds quite vague, I always know it when I see it!"

That last sentence, "I always know it when I see it" speaks volumes about Ziggy, her knowledge and trusting her publisher instinct. However, Ziggy wasn't always a publisher- "I actually started my career as a script editor in television drama. I felt quite frustrated by the corporate-ness of the editorial processes – a lot of cooks involved! I therefore took a career step sideways (or downwards if we're talking financially) into publishing. I worked for a small independent company called Black Dog

Publishing, in which we had zero budgets, but a huge amount of creative control. It was maddening and brilliant in equal measure. While I was at Black Dog I commissioned a couple books that did really well. So when I was pregnant with my first child, I had the idea that setting up my own company would be a way of earning some money and working on my own terms. It's been a long journey with many painful lessons that I've learned on the way, but I don't regret it for a minute. The freedom to commission and invest in stories and artists that I believe in is a privilege that I am grateful for every day."

Cicada Books have a huge focus on the illustrative side of picture books. The stories are important, of course, but "Illustration is at the heart of what we do at Cicada. We find talented people on the blogs and on Instagram – and sometimes the graduate shows, and then try to find a story to work up together. Sometimes we develop stories that they generate, and sometimes we work with a pool of in-house writers to create a narrative that suits their style. But it's absolutely an illustrator-led process."

The current catalogue can be viewed from the Cicada Books Website (cicadabooks.co.uk) and there are some stunning books to look forward to this season. I am particularly keen to read *Atlas of Amazing Architecture* by Peter Allen, publishing October 2020. Ziggy is looking forward to "*Pocket Chaotic* – that's a really silly story about a kangaroo joey whose mum is always shoving rubbish in her pocket, illustrated by Daniel Gray-Barnett. Another funny one will be *Bartholomew and the Morning Monsters*, which is about a boy who struggles to get himself ready in the morning. That one is by a young Irish illustrator called Ruan van Vliet, whose work just cracks me up."

With plenty to look forward to from Cicada Books, I am pleased to have had the chance to get to know Ziggy and her team better through this interview.

Article and interview by **Erin Hamilton**

Picture books

A Bear Named Bjorn

Delphine Perret

Alfred's Adventures in the Children's City

Imogen Alexander and Rose Feather, illus.
Rose Feather

The Blue Giant

Katie Cottle

The Cockerel and the Fox

Retelling by Helen Ward

Crying is like the Rain

Heather Hawk Feinberg, illus. Chamisa Kellogg

Do Grannies Have Green Fingers?

Fransie Frandsen

Elephant in my Kitchen!

Smriti Halls, illus. Ella Okstad

Good Guys, Bad Guys

Joanne Rocklin, illus. Nancy Carpenter

The Huffalots

Eve Coy

Hugo

Atinuke, illus. Birgitta Sif

I Am Perfectly Designed

Karamo Brown and Jason "Rachel" Brown,
illus. Anoosha Syed

Ig Pig and Og Frog

Sophie Burrows

In the City

Holly James, illus. Hannah Tolson

Lisette's Green Sock

Catharina Valckx, trans. Anthony Shugaar,
illus. Catharina Valckx

Little Blue House Beside the Sea

Jo Ellen Bogart, illus. Carme Lemniscates

The Lost Leopard

Jonny Marx, illus. Xuan Le

Meet Monster

Ellen Blance and Ann Cook, illus. Quentin
Blake

My Rhino Is Better Than Yours

Bec Barnes

Penpals Forever

C K Smouha, illus. Jürg Lindenberger

Rabbit's Spring Gift

Anita Loughrey, illus. Lucy Barnard

Unstoppable

Adam Rex and Laura Park

Willow the Armadillo

Marilou Reeder, illus. Dave Mottram

Junior books

The Beast and the Bethany

Jack Meggitt-Phillips, illus. Isabelle Follath

The Boy Who Made the World Disappear

Ben Miller, illus. Daniela Jaglenka Terrazzin

Hello, Universe

Erin Entrada Kelly

Lena the Sea and Me

Maria Parr, trans. Guy Puzey

Midnight's Twins

Holly Race

My Name is River

Emma Rea

Nowhere on Earth

Nick Lake

The Pear Affair

Judith Eagle

Poems Aloud

Joseph Coelho, illus. Daniel Gray-Barnett

Rebel with a Cupcake

Anna Mainwaring

Sofia the Dreamer and Her Magical Afro

Jessica Wilson

The Strangeworlds Travel Agency

L D Lapinski

That Time I Got Kidnapped

Tom Mitchell

We Are Bound By Stars

Kesia Lupo

Willow Wildthing and the Swamp Monster

Gill Lewis

Wonderscape

Jennifer Bell

The Worst Class in the World

Joanna Nadin, illus. Rikin Parekh

Young Adult books

A Kind of Spark

Elle McNicoll

Asking for a Friend

Kate Mallinder

Aurora Rising

Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff

Blood Moon

Lucy Cuthew

The Colours that Blind

Rutendo Tavengerwei

Deleted

Sylvia Hehir

Echo Mountain

Lauren Wolk

Hello Now

Jenny Valentine

Incendiary

Zoraida Córdova

Last Lesson

James Goodhand

Love on the Main Stage

S.A. Domingo

Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know

Samira Ahmed

Melt my Heart

Bethany Rutter

Song Beneath the Tides

Beverley Birch

Wonderland

Juno Dawson

Non-Fiction books

100 Children's Books that Inspire Our World

Colin Salter, ed. Hetty Hopkinson

A Climate in Chaos

Neal Layton

Backward Science

Clive Gifford, illus. Anne Wilson

Be Plastic Clever

Amy and Ella Meek, illus. Sarah Goodreau

Economics for Beginners

Laura Bryan and Andy Prentice, illus. Federico Mariani

Every Second

Bruno Gibert

The Farm That Feeds Us

Nancy Castaldo, illus. Ginnie Hsu

Get Ahead in Chemistry from the Periodic Table to the Apocalypse

Tom Whipple, Illus. James Davies

Invisible Nature A Secret World Beyond our Senses

Catherine Barr, illus. Anne Wilson

Marvellous Magicians

Lydia Corry

Nature's Light Spectacular

Katy Flint, illus. Cornelia Li

Philosophy for Beginners

Jordan Akpojaro, Rachel Firth and Minna Lacey, illus. Nick Radford

The Secret Life of Trees

Maira Butterfield, illus. Vivian Mineker

The Tale of a Toothbrush

M G Leonard, illus. Daniel Rieley

When Darwin Sailed the Sea

David Long, illus. Sam Kalda

World of Wonder: Mountains

Charlotte Guillain, illus. Chris Maddon