

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

No.228

the children's book magazine online

January 2018

2018: what's instore for the
world of children's books?

Authorgraph interview: Liz Kessler

Windows into Illustration: Holly Sterling

Plus Beyond the Secret Garden?
opening up the world of children's books



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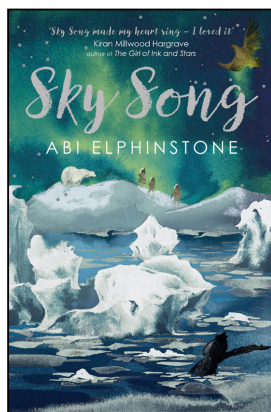
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COVER STORY

This issue's cover illustration is from **Sky Song** by **Abi Elphinstone**. The illustrator is **Daniela Terrazzini**. Thanks to **Simon and Schuster Children's Books** for their help with this January cover.



2018: the year ahead

2017 was an unsettling year for all sorts of reasons, and change looks set to be the theme of **2018**. What will the new year bring for the world of children's books? **Books for Keeps** asked those in the know for their predictions.

Nicky Morgan, Interim Director, Children and Young People, Arts Council England

We're really excited to see what 2018 brings for children's literature and libraries in general. As we start the new year, our main concerns in this area focus on the falling sales of literary fiction, and local authority funding for libraries. However, in April, our largest ever group of arts and culture organisations will be beginning their four year funding journey with us, which includes seven library services, 48 literature organisations and the **Society for Chief Librarians**.

We'll support these organisation to create compelling experiences and innovative projects to instill a love of books and reading in young people, which will last throughout their childhood and into adult life and we will continue to work with the **Society for Chief Librarians** on a wide range of programmes including Baby Bounce and Rhyme sessions for pre-school children, **Reading Hack** activities for teens and the ever-popular **Summer Reading Challenge**.

The introduction of our **Artsmark Partnership Programme** will also see more cultural organisations, including libraries, engage and support schools working towards their **Artsmark** award – bringing a richness of arts and cultural experiences to thousands of children across the country.

Emily Drabble, head of children's book promotion and prizes Book Trust

There's been a lot talk for so long now about how to make children's books more diverse in terms of representation in books as well diverse backgrounds of authors, illustrators and people in the children's books industry. It feels like we are on the cusp of zeitgeist change in terms of ethnicity at least, and there's some really positive action. I keep hearing about exciting new initiatives and publishers with bright ideas (I'm really excited about **Knights Of** for example) so I'm feeling optimistic. However there's still a long way to go for the kind of diversity of ALL types that I'd love to see reflected in children's books.

Aimée Felone, Knights Of

Representation, in our industry as well as in the books published, will continue to be the topic of discussion for 2018. 2017 saw an increased awareness of what the industry is not doing and who isn't being served and this conversation will continue in 2018. As we have seen, independent publishers and agencies are able to implement business models and structures that place representation and inclusion at the forefront of their company – to effective results. The success of these indies will continue and authors and large corporate publishers alike will increasingly look to them as part of the solution, hopefully leading to both increased support and permanent change.

Teresa Cremin Professor of Education, The Open University

Will 2018 herald many changes in the world of children's reading? I doubt radical shifts are ahead of us, but the renewed educational attention we've seen of late to reading for pleasure will remain central, especially since the recent PIRLS (2016) results show England

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lagging well behind internationally in this regard. So awareness of the profession's legal and moral responsibility for reading for pleasure will continue to grow. Supported by new initiatives such as the **Egmont Reading for Pleasure Awards** and the Open University's Research informed website, this will begin to encompass much more than standalone initiatives and new reading areas and will, I hope, include increased awareness of children's identities as readers. In particular teachers will become more open to personal interests in reading and as a result the persistent focus on fiction will begin to diversify, with increased attention to the pleasures to be found in non-fiction and poetry. However the professional thirst for children's literature will remain and the use of graphic novels will also increase, although rather more slowly, alongside enhanced awareness of world literature and authorial diversity. Although the lack of primary phase librarians and budget cuts will significantly reduce the scope of these developments, on balance I think 2018 looks inviting.

**Louise Johns-Shepherd, Chief Executive,
Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)**

At CLPE we are definitely going to be talking a lot about the importance of books for children that reflect the reality of our diverse and changing world. Both in terms of the characters and stories and in terms of authorship and creation. We're beginning an exciting new project where we are creating the first survey of ethnic diversity within UK children's literature. Our intention is to make visible data that will support all those who work in and with the children's publishing industry to make sure children's literature meaningfully reflects the realities of its readership. Our colleagues at Book Trust are also collecting data about the representation of BAME authors and illustrators as creators of children's literature and there are many other important projects and programmes from other organisations that will begin or embed in 2018. We are looking forward to 2018 being a year of action, particularly around positive and authentic representation of our population in children's books and where new voices, new publishers and new characters will find powerful new places.

Julia Eccleshare Head of Policy at the Public Lending Right

Reading the fast-sellers of 2017 list showed the massive dominance of just a handful of authors. It's not that I begrudge these authors their success but how can 'newer' (and often that's authors who've been in print for 5 years!) get to a bigger market – in particular to teachers?

Too much pressure on authors to publish two books a year in an attempt to crack the above problem. Quantity is important but quality matters even more.

Too many books which are 'like' someone else's book. The best authors – Philip Pullman, Elizabeth Laird and Sarah Crossan all spring to mind and there are many others – write something different and surprising not only to other people but also to themselves every time.

Closure of libraries! Libraries are vital to children and to children's authors. Year after year borrowing figures show that children still use libraries A LOT. How will this generation of children and those who come after them learn to browse a range of books and find the books they really like without a library to go to?

Shoo Rayner, the Society of Authors

As the new **Chair of CWIG (The Children's Writers & Illustrators Group)** of the **Society of Authors**, I'm made well aware of the ever-diminishing earnings of authors.

Some stories I've heard recently have been quite alarming. Find out how authors get paid – or not – here <http://www.societyofauthors.org/Where-We-Stand/buying-choices>

This year will see the **CWIG Reading For Pleasure Award** roll out. So often authors are really inspired by the work some schools do to inspire children to read for pleasure and want to let those schools know that their good work has been noticed. The award is a simple way for us to say 'Good job!'

Tony Bradman Chair of ALCS, the Authors Licensing and Collecting Society

The biggest issue by far in 2018 will be a simple one – how can we stop the seemingly relentless decline of our public library service? The figures for budget cuts, closures and restricted opening times make very depressing reading. Readers of **Books for Keeps** will know just how important libraries can be in the development of reading for pleasure in children – indeed, with the decline of school library provision, it's getting harder to see how children in some areas can get access to books at all. Ask most children's writers and they'll tell you that libraries played a central role in their choice of career. Let's hope there will be a change of heart at government and local level on the subject – but I have a feeling that will only come about if we keep banging on about it!

Jake Hope reading development and children's book consultant

It will be exciting to see the outcome of the ongoing **CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Diversity Review**. I personally hope that this might create momentum and help to lobby for change that becomes wider than the awards alone. For change to be effected, and indeed effective, every part of the sector needs active involvement. With a global political canvas that appears to be shrinking, there's great incentive behind achieving this, ensuring the industry at large embraces the breadth of lifestyles, experiences and backgrounds that make-up the many facets of our society. These need to be reflected and represented not only in the illustrators and authors being published, but through every stage of agents, publishers, booksellers, librarians, teachers, reviewers, awards and – of course – readers themselves. There has often been idealised discussion around the republic of reading, to be a true democracy we have to ensure equality and representation for all.

Joy Court, Chair: CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Medals; Reviews Editor: The School Librarian Journal

I cannot help but think that the issue of diversity in publishing will rightly continue to be a major focus in 2018 with publishing for children and young people going from strength to strength as a result of new talents and voices coming through. Certainly as Reviews Editor the parcels that I have been unpacking over the last year and increasingly for books to come in 2018 have revealed some blistering new talent from diverse voices of many kinds. There is much positive work on improving representation and diversity in the industry and I'm optimistic that we will see real and lasting change. These are long-term challenges and everyone involved in children's books has a responsibility to do all they can – but I see the commitment to getting it right throughout the chain of creating and commissioning, to production and sales, and then appearing in bookshops and libraries. We all want all young people to become avid readers and find the books that excite them and open up new opportunities.

What to read in 2018

Going by the bestseller lists, 2017 belonged to David Walliams and Tony Ross. Check out the shortlists for the **Carnegie** and **Kate Greenaway Medals**, for the **Costa Children's Book Award**, the **Blue Peter Book Award** or the **Children's Book Award** and they tell a somewhat different story. But what are the books to watch in 2018? We asked the UK's leading children's books editors to tell us. Here are their choices, in alphabetical order by publisher.

Tamar Brazil, Editorial Director at **Abrams**

British design team Peskimo is back with the sixth installment in their **BLOCK BOOK** series **Star Wars Block**, taking readers on a tour through the **Star Wars** universe. **They Say Blue** is a playful and philosophical picture book about colour and perspective with captivating paintings full of movement and transformation that follows a young girl through a day. For those fans of **Ada Twist, Scientist** we have a companion project book full of activities and experiments: **Ada Twist's Big Project Book for Stellar Scientists**. Its illustrator, David Roberts, has also illustrated Ying Compestine's retelling of **The Chinese Emperor's New Clothes** out this January. **The Faithful Spy** a graphic novel by John Hendix tells the gripping story of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a minister who joined a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler.

Charlie Sheppard, Publishing Director, **Andersen Press**

This year I'm thrilled to be commemorating the centenary of the Representation of the People's Act with the paperback publication of Sally Nicholl's **Things a Bright Girl Can Do**. The hardback of this wonderful suffragette novel had a fantastic critical reaction last year and now in paperback we think it's the book everyone will be talking about in 2018. I'm also very excited that Julian Clary's hilarious **Bolds** will have their own **World Book Day** book this year followed by the new hardback – **The Bolds in Trouble** – which is quite possibly their best adventure yet. With new novels from Melvin Burgess, Susin Nielsen and Sharon Dogar, it's going to be a great year for fiction at Andersen Press.

Libby Hamilton, editorial director picture books, **Andersen Press**

It's a struggle to fit in every picture book highlight on the Andersen list in 2018! My hot tip in paperback is Rob Starling's dragon who struggles to manage his temper, in **Fergal is Fuming**. Brand new hardbacks include the unmissable and unapologetically ruthless tale of **Ten Fat Sausages** from Michelle Robinson and Tor Freeman; **Looking After William**, role reversal that tugs on your heartstrings, from Eve Coy; Linda Bailey's **Mary Who Wrote Frankenstein**, illustrated by the matchless Júlia Sardà; and drawing the year to a close, the best grudge-match I've ever read, by **Fred Blunt: Santa Claus vs the Easter Bunny**. The holidays just got serious.

Anna McQuinn, Publisher, **Alanna Books**

I can't wait for April when we publish the next in the **Lulu & Zeki** series. Now he's a big boy, Zeki can do so much by himself! He's keen to show his new skills at his check-up where he is also weighed and measured. Once again, Ruth Hearson captures Dad's tender care for his son in her gorgeous illustrations. August sees the paperback of **Lulu Gets a Cat**. Readers loved the hardcover: 'So. Stinking. Adorable. Perfect for cat lovers of all ages. Five stars.' I love this series because she's part of such a literate family, making regular trips to the library. Here, when she wants a cat, she first reads about what it'll entail to be a pet owner. 'Lulu never fails to delight: this new story, endorsed by the National Cats Adoption Centre, ticks all the boxes.' Jill Bennett – need we say more?

Ailsa Bathgate, Editorial Director, **Barrington Stoke**

2018 looks set to be a bumper year for Barrington Stoke! We've got firm favourites returning with Non Pratt as she delivers another knock-out YA in **Second Best Friend** in January exploring friendship and flaws, while Alexander McCall Smith offers a much-needed tonic in

the form of a joyful, toe-tapping story about young kids chasing big dreams in **Hari and His Electric Feet**. We're delighted to welcome new names in Katherine Woodfine and Kate Pankhurst in April, collaborating on stunning **Little Gem Rose's Dress of Dreams**, inspired by the life of trailblazer and first credited fashion designer, Rose Bertin. And rounding things off, in May we publish our YA novella **The Family Tree** by the much-missed Mal Peet, brimming with his trademark poignancy and heartfelt prose, and with colour artwork from rising star Emma Shoard.

Emma Blackburn, Editorial Director Picture Books, **Bloomsbury Children's Books**

Fans of the bestselling **You Can't Take an Elephant on the Bus** by Patricia Cleveland-Peck and David Tazzyman will be delighted with the much-anticipated follow-up **You Can't let an Elephant Drive a Digger**. Vehicle-crazy kids will also delight in **Car, Car, Truck, Jeep** by Katrina Charman and Nick Sharratt – jam-packed with things that go, pre-schoolers will love singing along to the tune of *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*. For swashbuckling adventures **Princess Swashbuckle** by Hollie Hughes and Deborah Allwright is a must-have. And everyone should be on the look out for Baby Frank – he's the world's most unlikely criminal and he's about to pull off a daring bank heist in **Baby's First Bank Heist** by Jim Whalley and Stephen Collins.

Ellen Holgate, Editorial Director for Fiction, **Bloomsbury Children's Books**

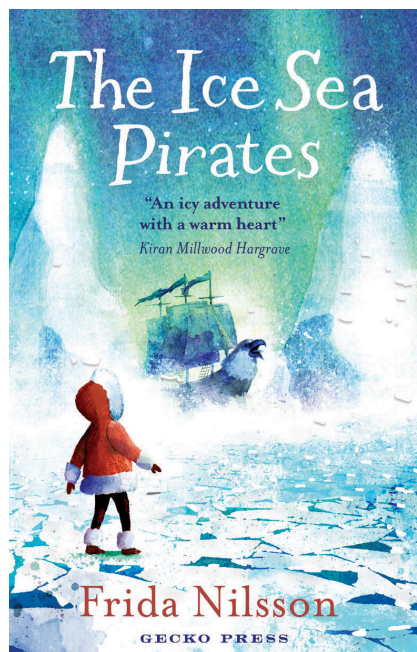
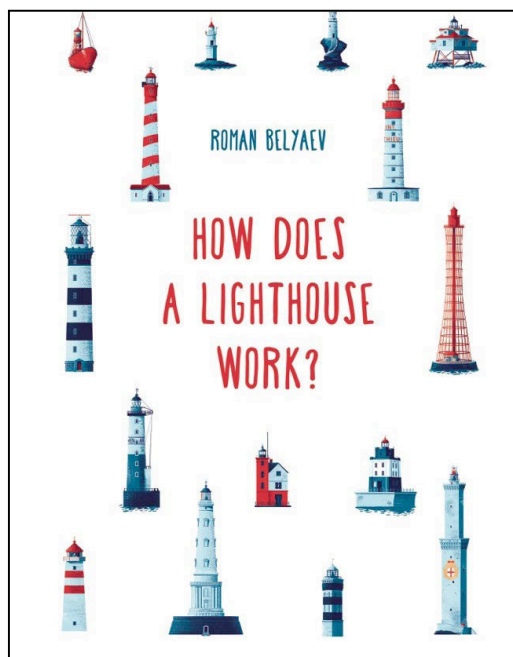
In January we publish Katherine Rundell's extraordinary novel **The Explorer** in paperback following her **Costa Children's Book Award** win. March sees the launch of **Kid Normal** and **the Rogue Heroes** – the hilarious sequel to the bestselling debut middle grade story of 2017 by Radio 1 duo Greg James and Chris Smith. In July Catherine Doyle's middle grade debut **The Storm Keeper's Island** is the first in a big, classic fantasy series – a story with enormous heart and the kind of magic I loved in the writing of Susan Cooper. And in September Jessie Burton's first children's book **The Restless Girls**, sumptuously illustrated by Angela Barrett, is the unmissable highlight of the year.

Sharon Hutton, Publishing Director Non Fiction, **Bloomsbury Children's Books**

The Silk Roads An Illustrated New History of the World is a brand new book full of wonder and fascination for children. Peter Frankopan, bestselling author and historian explores the connections made by people, trade, disease, war, religion, adventure, science and technology in this extraordinary book about how the east married the west with a remarkable voyage at its heart – the journey along the Silk Roads. Fantastically Great Women Who Made History is another extraordinary book from the pen and brush of the hugely talented, fantastically great, Kate Pankhurst. Following the phenomenally successful, **Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World**, the best-selling children's non-fiction title in the UK market in 2017, it inspires with the stories, accomplishments and adventures of more great women such as Mary Shelley, Harriet Tubman, Qui Jin, Boudicca, Flora Drummond and more.

Leilani Sparrow, Managing Editor, **Boxer Books**

We are thrilled to be publishing Lisa Stickley's **Dress Like Mummy** on 1st February. This gorgeous picture book explores life through the eyes of a child who loves dressing up. Her most favourite thing is when the colours of her clothes completely match mummy's – whether it's orange cycle shorts, purple hats or blue tops with lots and lots of beads. It's told with humour and affection and stands out with its fabric cover and stunning design. Lisa Stickley has sold product to Paul Smith, Harrods, Boots and Selfridges. She is currently working on some bespoke cushions for Liberty, and has also been nominated for the **CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal 2018**. She's amazingly talented and we're very proud to be publishing her.



Sam Hutchinson, b small publishing

How Does a Lighthouse Work? written and illustrated by Roman Belyaev is my book to watch. This beautiful, atmospheric non-fiction book is a celebration of lighthouses, their coastal history and the engineering that goes into making them work. It's particularly exciting since we acquired the rights from a Russian publisher so it's the first Russian translation that we are publishing.

Barry Cunningham, Managing Director, Chicken House

TIN is an arrestingly original middle-grade story by Irish debut Pádraig Kenny, set in an alternative England of the 1930s. Christopher is 'Proper': a real boy with a real soul, orphaned in a fire. He works for an engineer, maker of the eccentric, loyal and totally individual mechanicals who are Christopher's best friends. But after an accident, a secret is revealed and his world changes for ever. What follows is a remarkable adventure in which Christopher discovers the truth about his past – and what it really means to be human. This ambitious and incredibly exciting story already reads like a classic. You'll love the humour, warmth and fantastic ensemble cast – a wonderful beginning for a major new voice in middle-grade.

Sue Baker, Editor, Child's Play (International) Ltd.

Continuing their tradition, **Child's Play** is delighted to be publishing a number of first time author/illustrators. Nipper and the Lunchbox, a heart-warming picture book about loyalty and friendship, with illustrations that show all manner of human interaction by Lucy Dillamore. Recycling and repurposing are the only options for the king in **King Leonard's Teddy**, when he realises that nobody can repair his broken teddy. Strong illustrations and a thoughtful message from Phoebe Swan remind us that change can be a good thing. Seen through the eyes of a small boy, **The Last Child on St Kilda** is the story of one child's experience of living in a small community on a remote Scottish island. Illustrated with original prints, Beth Waters's research and attention to detail makes this a book for all ages. **The Things** by Petronela Dostalova examines the relationship between two Things who are both under the illusion that each presents a threat to the other. Only when they get close-up, do they realise that they are both the same. A funny book about how misconceptions can diminish our lives and how easy it is to learn a thing or two.

Ginee Seo, Children's Publishing Director, Chronicle Books

Caldecott Honor winner Brendan Wenzel brings his perceptive eye to **Hello Hello**, an ingenious book that introduces very young readers to concepts ranging from simple to abstract and celebrates the diversity of nature through a dazzling and joyful array of animals, many of them endangered. **Forever Or A Day** is a gorgeous meditation on time and what it means to a parent and a child. This book made editors cry when we presented it at Bologna – always a good sign!

And we're delighted to reward Annie Barrows and Sophie Blackall's many patient fans with a new **Ivy and Bean** story at long last! It may well be the funniest one yet, as Ivy and Bean set out to prove that just because Ivy is an only child, it doesn't mean she's spoiled.

Rachel Williams, Publisher, Lincoln Children's Books

In Spring we launch a new picture book initiative, **First Editions** – led by Editorial Director Katie Cotton and devoted to discovering the world's best debut talent. With 6 new titles publishing this year, including a brave little girl from Grace Easton and lemurs and lions from Cindy Wume, these are the new voices for a new generation. We also have the only book conceived and written by The Mandela family, **Grandad Mandela**, to publish on what would have been his 100th birthday this July. And the long-awaited follow up from Waterstone's prize author David Litchfield: **The Bear, The Piano, The Dog and the Fiddle**. 2018 is going to be our year of women, with 9 new **Little People Big Dreams** taking the list to a 20-titles strong, featuring best-loved icons like Jane Austen, Anne Frank, Josephine Baker and Jane Goodall. These are complimented by a new book about princesses that we can all be proud of: **Power to the Princess** (Sept), written by kid lit star Vita Weinstein Murrow and illustrated by Julia Bereciartu.

Julia Marshall, Publisher, Gecko Press

Frida Nilsson is a perfect Gecko Press writer—internationally recognised and award-winning; her writing original, commercial, pacy and assured – and she is not yet discovered in English. **The Ice Sea Pirates** has made her a sensation in Sweden and Europe. It was nominated for six major awards (winning three), with rights sold around the world. Nilsson has won several big children's book awards, including the **German Youth Literature Prize** and the **Astrid Lindgren Prize**. She was selected by the Hay Festival as one of Europe's top writers under 39 for young people. **The Ice Sea Pirates** is a page turning adventure for eight pluses, set in the swirling Arctic amid mermaids, ice, wolves and of course, pirates – and Siri, a brave and characterful child who is up against them all.

Harriet Wilson, Editorial Director, HarperCollins Children's Books

I've chosen **Rory Branagan (Detective)** by Andrew Clover and Ralph Lazar. I first fell in love with the character of Rory himself. He zings off the page with the energy, optimism and emotions of a real ten-year-old. One minute he's full of confidence and determination, and the next he is powerless and being sat on by his big brother. He is totally awed by Cassidy (and rightly so). These characters worked their way into my heart and underlying the big crime-adventures are real relationships and hilarious family dynamics (Rory and his brother are my favourite). And the illustrations are the perfect complement to the text. With deceptively simple lines, Ralph can send you on wild flights of imagination, crack you up laughing or break your heart.

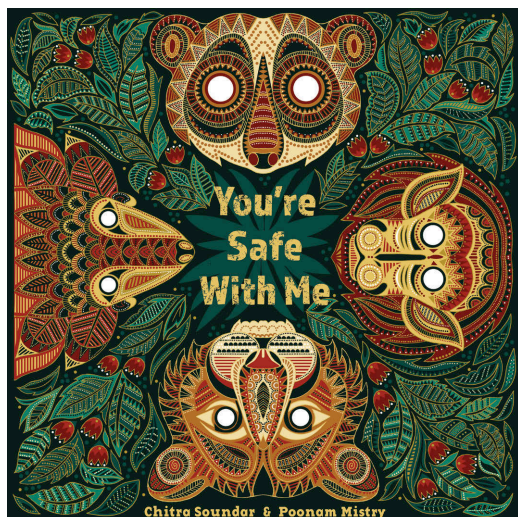
Katherine Agar, Acting Editorial Director, **Hodder Children's Books**

I'm very proud of the **Rabbit and Bear** series by Julian Gough, illustrated by Jim Field: we're publishing the third title, **Attack of the Snack**, this month, and I'm excited – it seems to be one of those rare series where each book finds more readers than the previous one! I love it because the text and art work seamlessly, and make kids laugh ... and I love it even more because it makes parents laugh, too. As well as being funny, and a bit scatological, the books are (secretly) about other things too: this one is all about kindness, about learning from your mistakes, and about welcoming people – even if you find them a bit scary at first.

Emma Matthewson, Publishing Director, **Hot Key Books and Piccadilly Press**

We are so excited to leap into the New Year with **The Cruel Prince** by the magically talented Holly Black - the first of a trilogy and those who have read it are already begging for the next instalment! Holly has truly proved herself a faerie queen as she weaves a tale of kingdoms, cruelty and seduction when a mortal girl is ensnared in a royal web of intrigue. YA and adult readers alike are sure to love it. Also coming: **The Island** by MA Bennett. **S.T.A.G.S.**, MA Bennett's YA debut, sold translation rights like wildfire. Her next book is a contemporary **The Lord Of The Flies**. In the aftermath of a plane crash a group of ill-assorted teens slowly, terrifyingly, realise they have crashed onto a deserted island. It is up to them to work together to survive ... a fast-paced tale with a twist that will have teen and YA readers gripped.

Lisa Edwards, Head of Children's Publishing, **Kings Road Publishing**
Templar Publishing greets its 40th anniversary year with a roster of sparkling picture books, non-fiction and novelty titles. In picture books, Jonny Duddle's hilarious pirate family the Jolley-Rogers return to these shores with **The Pirates of Scurvy Sands** in February, and we welcome Greenaway winner Grahame Baker Smith back to the list with the jaw-dropping **Rhythm of the Rain** in April. In August, we launch a new non-fiction series with the incredible Britta Teckentrup, with **There are Fish Everywhere**, and our Christmas headliner is **Welcome to the Museum: Planetarium**, in partnership with The Science Museum, written by UCL's Professor Raman Prinja and illustrated by the sensational Chris Wormell.



Alice Curry, Founder and Publisher, **Lantana Publishing**

2017 saw Lantana make the shortlist for the **Bologna Prize for Best Children's Publisher of the Year**, and 2018 is set to get better still. We have several standout titles this year, including **Nimesh the Adventurer** by debut author Ranjit Singh and **Kate Greenaway Medal**-nominated Mehrdokht Amini about a little boy with a BIG imagination, and **You're Safe With Me**, a gorgeous modern fable by acclaimed author Chitra Soundar and new standout talent Poonam Mistry. It is a collaboration set to continue with a follow-up title, **You're Snug With Me**, scheduled for the autumn. Finally, look out for **Peace and Me**: a collection of peace ideas inspired by Nobel Peace Prize laureates of the 20th and 21st centuries – the illustrations are stunning!

Elizabeth Jenner, Children's Editorial Director, **Laurence King**

We have some really vibrant new non-fiction publishing this year on a wealth of subjects. It's so hard to single any out, but I'm particularly excited to be launching our beautiful narrative non-fiction biography series, **Little Guides to Great Lives**. Gorgeously designed and illustrated in an eye-catching mini format, this series introduces children to some of the most inspirational figures from history in a fun, accessible way, including Marie Curie and Nelson Mandela. Others to look out for are Marion Deuchar's **Bob the Artist** embarking on new exploits in **Bob's Blue Period**, and Helen Friel's **Hoakes Island**. Using a hidden map and a red lens, help the animals of Hoakes Island crack the puzzles, solve the mystery, and save their home from the evil property developers in this wonderfully innovative puzzle mystery adventure.

Suzanne Carnell, Two Hoots Publisher, **Macmillan Children's Books**

Next year marks the 100th anniversary of (some) women getting the vote and as part of the celebrations Two Hoots is publishing an extraordinary book for older children about the campaign for women's suffrage. Written and illustrated by David Roberts, **Suffragette: The Battle for Equality** is an absolute tour de force – 128 pages of fascinating stories about incredible women, all illustrated with the most breath-taking pictures. Equally stunning is the gorgeous **One Day in Wonderland**, about Lewis Carroll and the story of Alice, written by and richly illustrated by the amazing Júlia Sardà. And look out for the paperback edition of the brilliantly funny, seriously clever **I'm Just No Good At Rhyming** by Chris Harris and Lane Smith: genius.

Rachel Petty, Editorial Director, **Macmillan Children's Books**

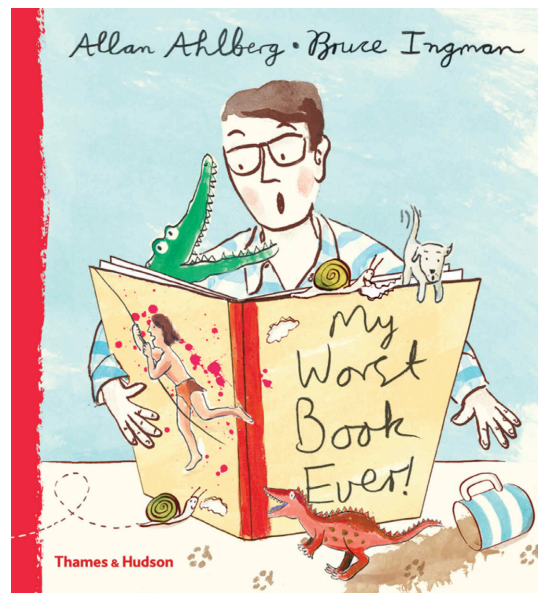
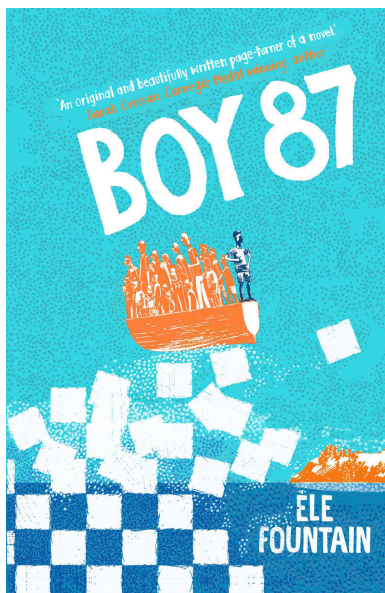
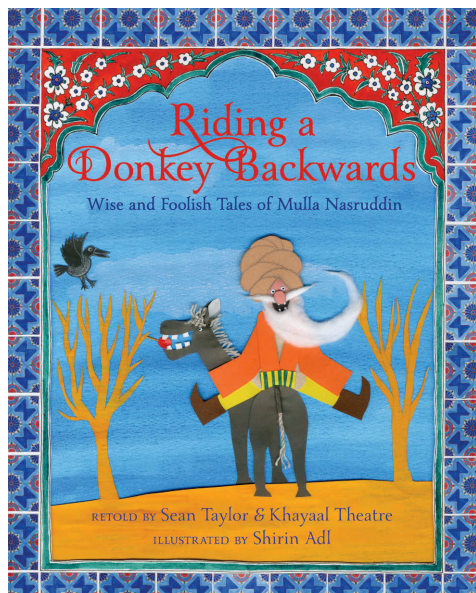
We've got some really exciting YA coming in 2018 with the launch of the incredible **Children of Blood and Bone** by US author Tomi Adeyemi, which mixes magic, romance and the spirit of the Black Lives Matter movement with elements of West African mythology in a richly imagined fantasy world. We also have the wonderful Sara Barnard's **Goodbye, Perfect**, which is about two best friends who realise they don't know each other as well as they thought when one of them runs away with a teacher, and **Out of the Blue** by Sophie Cameron – a stunning debut about grief, new love and family against a backdrop of angels falling from the sky. Finally I can't wait for everyone to read **Floored** – a seven-author collaborative novel by Sara Barnard, Holly Bourne, Tanya Byrne, Non Pratt, Melinda Salisbury, Lisa Williamson and Eleanor Wood – it's **One Day** meets **The Breakfast Club**!

Venetia Gosling, Publisher, **Macmillan Children's Books**

I'm especially excited about Lauren St John's new middle-grade series, **Kat Wolfe Investigates**, which sees her return to her mystery heartland with an exciting adventure set on the Jurassic Coast, featuring a tween detective and a host of animal sidekicks. I'm also delighted to be launching a brand new voice with Birdie Milano's unmissable LGBT summer romance, **Boy Meets Hamster**, which is full of hilarity and heart. And we also have **The 104-Storey Treehouse**, the eighth title in Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton's towering **Treehouse** series, with laughter on every level – as well as another Australian bestseller, **Ruby Red Shoes** by Kate Knapp, making her UK debut with this utterly charming illustrated series about a little hare who loves to travel. It's a contemporary **Little Grey Rabbit** and perfect for newly-independent readers.

Kate Wilson, Managing Director, **Nosy Crow**

I Am The Seed That Grew The Tree, is, without question, the most ambitious book I've ever worked on, and is, I think, based on thirty years in the business, the most ambitious poetry collection I know of. Award-winning anthologist, Fiona Waters, has selected a nature poem for children for every day of the year, spanning over 400 years of poetry (so it includes, just to mention some of the Williams, William Shakespeare, William Blake, William Wordsworth and William Carlos Williams) and the 336 pages are illustrated in spreads and in full-colour, by the first UK **Maurice Sendak Fellowship** winner, Frann Preston-Gannon. It's so rich and beautiful, and I am ridiculously proud of it.



Helen Carr, editor, the O'Brien Press

I'm particularly excited about **We're Going to the Zoo!** a brilliant picture book by Sarah Bowie; sisters, Kitty and Clara are immortalising zoo animals different ways – Kitty is drawing them and Clara's snapping photos. This is a warm story about two competitive but loving sisters, jam-packed with fun animal facts. I loved seeing Sarah Bowie's witty portraits of different species take shape and I can't wait to see the book on the shelves. I'm also looking forward to the publication of **Rugby Heroes** by Gerard Siggins, the sixth book in a 'spooks and sport' series; star player Eoin is facing a busy year of schools' rugby and has to sort out a potential disaster in Irish rugby – with the help of all the rugby-playing ghosts he's met in the course of the series. Eoin is a really appealing hero and the series' mix of mystery and high-octane sport has won it many fans.

Helen Thomas, Editorial Director, Orion Children's Books

Following one of the hottest debuts of 2017, which has been met with overwhelming support and enthusiasm, I can't wait for readers to experience Jessica Townsend's second book set in the wondrous world of Nevermoor – **Wundersmith**. Morrigan Crow may have defeated her deadly curse, passed near-impossible trials and joined the mystical Wondrous Society, but her journey into Nevermoor and all its secrets has only just begun. And it's important to remember that not all magic is used for good... Morrigan Crow is a heroine we'll be seeing a lot more of in the coming years, and her creator, Jessica, is so talented it takes my breath away, with a depth of imagination that seems to know no end.

Janetta Otter-Barry, Publisher, Otter-Barry Books

I love the mischievous humour in **Riding a Donkey Backwards, Wise and Foolish Tales of Mulla Nasruddin**, by Sean Taylor and Khayaal Theatre, illustrated by Shirin Adl (April). Mulla Nasruddin is a favourite character in many Muslim cultures and it's a privilege to introduce these funny, vibrant and wise stories, perfectly complemented by Shirin's humorous and richly decorative artwork, to a new young audience. I can't wait to publish Rachel Rooney's new poetry collection, **A Kid in My Class**, illustrated by Chris Riddell (August). There's a poem for every child in the class, from the dreamer and the tough kid to the poet and the kid who runs in his wheelchair, plus the class hamster. Witty, perceptive and full of empathy, with powerful yet sensitive blue-wash and pencil drawings, this is an amazing book!

Liz Cross, Head of Children's Publishing, Oxford

Bee Boy by Tony De Saulles has a gloriously light touch to the telling, a gripping story, and incredible two-colour spreads throughout. I think it will win many fans. Emma Fischel's first stand-alone novel, **Walls**, is also a real treat, with a distinctive narrator, a lovely bittersweet tone, and just a hint of magic. I found it unforgettable. And finally, **Speed Birds** by Alan Snow is a picture book like no other. It's an uplifting story about the power of perseverance – it's a book about how cars really work – and it's truly beautiful, too. A perfect gift.

Adam Freudenheim, Publisher and Managing Director, Pushkin Children's Books

I was in love with **The Goat** by Anne Fleming virtually from the first page, and I read most of it aloud to my 10-year-old daughter until she took it from me to finish on her own as she was impatient to keep reading. It all takes place in New York City, now, and mostly in and on one ordinary apartment building on which a mountain goat just happens to be living. It's funny and moving and full of a memorable cast of characters, including a girl called Kid and an older man who mostly can't speak, yet is the only one to actually see the elusive goat living on the window ledges. I found it irresistible and imagine most readers will too.

Sarah Odedina, Editor-at-Large, Pushkin Press

Boy 87 by Ele Fountain – a debut novel – is exciting because of the quality of the writing, the powerful creation of character, the brilliantly realised setting and the importance of its story in humanising and dignifying the life and journey of a young teen as he takes on the tough and dangerous journey from Eritrea to Europe. It is a book that gives humanity to a vast number of people by its wonderful portrayal of one person... it is a gem. Ele Fountain lived in Ethiopia and it was during that time that she wrote this thoughtful, kind and ultimately hopeful book that will offer young readers an important insight into the lives of people who make up the headlines of the news.

Lauren Fortune, Editorial Director, Scholastic

We are publishing a hugely timely and powerful book in May 2018 – **The Surface Breaks** by Louise O'Neill, a feminist reimagining of **The Little Mermaid**. The best fantasy writing holds a mirror up to the times we live in: a retelling of this beloved story, with the problematic elements of Hans Christian Andersen's original questioned and subverted, feels like a very necessary spin for young readers today. What Louise has done with this story is extraordinary – she is a wonderful writer who has a scalpel-sharp ability to get to the heart of what matters to teenagers. It is a tale with the darkest of undercurrents, full of rage and rallying cries: storytelling at its most spellbinding.

Helen Mackenzie Smith, Editorial Director for Picture Books, Simon and Schuster

I'm too excited about all the books we're publishing this year to be able to choose just one... But if I have to narrow it down, then there are three I'd love to highlight. First up: a new author-illustrator pairing for S&S of debut author Francis Martin and fabulous illustrator Claire Powell with the hilarious and hair-raising **Daddy Hairdo** in September. Then we've got a gorgeous and heart-warming new story from the world of **The Storm Whale** by Benji Davies in October, as well as the very funny and utterly charming **Dave the Lonely Monster** by the super-talented duo of Anna Kemp & Sara Ogilvie. So many treats in store!

Roger Thorp, Editorial Director, Thames & Hudson

My Worst Book Ever! by Allan Ahlberg; illustrated by Bruce Ingman has to be every publisher's dream – a book about books by two of the best bookmakers in the business. Allan and Bruce have worked on a number of successful books together but an ambition they and I shared was to create a book that tells the story of how a book is made, and, inevitably, how it can all go horribly wrong. The result is a joy – a book of humour and insight told with a combination of meticulous attention to detail and the imaginative flair for which both author and illustrator are justly renowned.

Sophie Hallam, Commissioning Editor, Tiny Owl Publishing Ltd.

As Tiny Owl soars into 2018, we are excited to announce our next wordless picture book **Chalk Eagle** by Nazli Tahvili. This story brings to life every child's dream of flying into the sky. Another big bang to the year is **The Drum** by Ken Wilson-Max – guaranteed to get you and your baby dancing to the beat! April is National Poetry Month in the US, and we are so proud to be introducing **Thinker: My Puppy Poet and Me** by the acclaimed African-American poet Eloise Greenfield. Finally, the first in our **One Story, Many Voices** series, **Cinderella of the Nile** is the earliest known version of the beloved tale, retold by the award-winning author Beverley Naidoo.

Rebecca Hill, Fiction Editorial Director, Usborne

Epic world-building seems a key feature of Usborne's 2018 list. In **The Extinction Trials** by S.M. Wilson, only those who risk everything can survive in a ruined world populated by dinosaurs. It's a chilling thrill-ride that you won't want to put down. Then there are walking houses in **The House with Chicken Legs** by Sophie Anderson. Our heroine, Marinka, is on a journey of self-discovery in this breathtaking reimagining of the Baba Yaga myth, brimming with a very special magic on every page. Hope for survival rests with two young hares and their human companions in **The Wild Folk** – a timeless and yet timely magical masterpiece by Sylvia V. Linsteadt, which we are all hugely excited about. And I can't wait for the first children's book by S.A. Patrick in his **Songs of Magic** series. Charting the bravery of three unusual outlaws battling against huge odds, this story has dragons, pipers, kind and corrupt wizards, and a cursed girl-turned-rat.

Louise Jordan, Queen Bee, Wacky Bee

For Wacky Bee 2018 is all about publishing outstanding middle-grade fiction from outside the UK. The incredible **Elise & the Second-hand Dog** by Danish author, Bjarne Reuter, was one of four honour titles from **BookTrust's** inaugural **In Other Words** initiative and deservedly so. Sharply written and acutely observed this Copenhagen-based story about loneliness and separation is both laugh-out-loud funny and heart wrenching. Then it's across to the other side of the world to explore the world of Felix Twain in **Double Felix** by Australian author, Sally Harris. Dealing, as it does, with the serious issue of autism this story also has the feel-good factor of the recent BBC TV series, **The A Word**. Oh, and I should add, that both books are beautifully illustrated throughout.

Jane Winterbotham, Publishing Director, Walker Books

In September, we bring together David Almond and Levi Pinfold in a stunning picture book, **The Dam**. David's spare and poignant text, together with Levi's dramatic paintings, evokes a landscape flooded by a reservoir, submerging the lives and community that came before, but kept alive by the music and dance of a girl and her father as they visit each house before they are lost to the water. This is our first picture book by David Almond who has contributed so many lovely illustrated fiction titles to the Walker list, and a wonderful opportunity to pair him with the artistic genius of Levi Pinfold, to create a gorgeous gift book that is a celebration of music, landscape and community.

Denise Johnstone-Burt, Editorial Director, Walker Books

Walker has a powerful list for 2018. In May, Angie Thomas's new YA novel **On The Come Up**, prequel to the bestselling **The Hate U Give** which took the world by storm last year, will again stop readers in their tracks. Also, in May to celebrate the World Cup, Alex Bellos and Ben Lyttleton's **Football School Quiz Book** followed by **Football School Season 3** in September show that this informative and fun non-fiction brand is growing fast. Our big new Walker Studio title is **Endangered**

Animals by Martin Jenkins, exquisitely illustrated by Tom Frost. Each animal sends a stamp from its threatened habitat to tell of its plight. No year would be complete without a new Patrick Ness and his fabulous reimagining of the story of Moby Dick **And The Ocean Was Our Sky** illustrated by newcomer Rovina Cai will thrill fans.

Deirdre McDermott, Picture Book Publisher and Creative Director, Walker Books

We are thrilled to celebrate Helen Oxenbury's 80th birthday and her exceptional contribution to children's books with a beautiful, definitive account of her life and work, **Helen Oxenbury: A Life in Illustration** (September), alongside a tenth anniversary edition of **Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes** (January). We're also looking forward to hosting Jon Klassen and Mac Barnett here in May when we publish **Square**, the second instalment in their Shape trilogy, and Jarvis (**Alan's Big, Scary Teeth**, the **V&A Best Illustrated Book 2017**) is ready to make readers roar with laughter once again with an underwater comedy, **Tropical Terry** (June). We round up the year with Jory John and Lane Smith's hilarious **Giraffe Problems** (October, the follow-up to **Penguin Problems**) and the wild **Angry Cookie** (October), the debut picture book from YA literary star, Laura Dockrill, illustrated by Maria Karipidou.

Caroline Royds, publisher, Specials and Non-Fiction, Walker Books

I loved every minute spent working on **A First Book of The Sea**. Coming in July this year, it's a big colourful anthology for young children, and a symphony of a book. Two thirds of our planet is ocean so it's odd we don't celebrate it more, but luckily Nicola Davies, who is never happier than when she's on the sea or in it, can evoke all its moods and write beautifully and knowledgeably about harbours and seashores, journeys, deep sea creatures, the weather, birds, fish and people. And every time a piece of artwork came in from Emily Sutton I marvelled at how much such a talented artist was enjoying herself and experimenting with technique in breathtaking ways. The sort of book that makes you glad to be in publishing!

Jenny Broom, Publisher, Wide Eyed Editions

My pick for Wide Eyed Edition's book of the year is the uplifting **Young, Gifted and Black**, publishing this February. Written by the self-styled 'movement builder, storyteller, and feminist activist' Jamia Wilson, and illustrated by the exuberant Andrea Pippins, the book is crammed with joy, energy and dynamism. Created in answer to the prophetic maxim, 'if you can't see it, you can't be it', the book journeys across borders, through time and even through space to tell the empowering stories of 52 icons of colour from the past and present in a celebration of their achievements, helping the next generation to chase their own dream . . . whatever it may be.

Laura Knowles, Editorial Director, words&pictures

I'm most excited to be publishing the captivating concertina book **The Skies Above My Eyes** by Charlotte Guillain and Yuval Zommer. It's a follow-up to **The Street Beneath My Feet**, this time looking up at the busy goings-on above us. We'll zoom through clouds and lightning storms, past birds and butterflies, helicopters and weather balloons, astronauts and asteroids, all the way to the edges of our galaxy and back down to Earth. Guillain has once again managed to distil a universe of facts into bite-sized nuggets of wonder, while Zommer brings so much life and joy to all his illustrations that I find childlike joy in seeing them laid out in a continuous artwork, stretching across the living room floor.

Fiona Kennedy, Publisher, Zephyr (Head of Zeus)

Zephyr's spring is about launching diverse debuts with stories to tell and memorable, empathetic new voices. A paperback edition of Yaba Badoe's **A Jigsaw of Fire and Stars**, 'ambitious and original', and first outings for **Me Mam. Me Dad. Me.** by Geordie author Malcolm Duffy, and Ewa Josefowicz's **The Mystery of the Colour Thief** – both tap into themes of family, friendship, nature, mental health. Dr Ben Garrod dazzles with the most up to date pocket-sized six book dinosaur non-fiction series in 66 million years. Our Autumn harvest is rich with well-established names including Marcus Sedgwick, Sally Gardner, Lauren St John, Steve Cole and Tony Ross. Tricky to choose a favourite – we're excited about them all!

'The Dyslexic Novelist'

Sally Gardner

Sally Gardner sees her dyslexia as a gift, but that's not how the world in general views the condition, which is why she set up charity **NUword** to challenge preconceptions.



The journey to starting the **NUword** charity has been a long one. It began when I had just published **I, Coriander** in 2005 and I was told that the press would like an angle to go on. 'Single mum, three children, written on a sofa', was taken. Would I contemplate talking about my dyslexia? My editor thought it a good idea – after all, she had to battle through my many drafts and dire spelling. I was less keen. I did not have a good relationship with the 'D word', seeing it more as a jack-

in-the-box than a friend that popped up at all the wrong occasions. Nevertheless, publicity didn't have any such qualms – it made a good story and avoided the 'single mum' pitch.

Henceforth I became known as 'The Dyslexic Novelist'. It struck reviewers as remarkable that someone with severe dyslexia could write at all. For the word carried the stigma of 'disability'. It was only then that my attitude towards the unspellable D word changed, because I began to realise that there was a general misinterpretation of dyslexia, not just a personal one. I know I see my dyslexia as a gift and I wouldn't be the writer I am without it. I have been given a great imagination, a love of words. I have a brain that doesn't work the same way as the majority and it shouldn't matter but it does. We accept diversity in culture, race, religion, sexuality. Why then do we refuse to accept diversity in the brain? Different minds think in different ways.

From 2005, after the publication of **I, Coriander** and as news of my dyslexia spread, I started to go into schools to talk to children, young adults and teachers about being dyslexic. To begin with I did so shyly, thinking that things must have changed for the better only to find that in fact little has changed except that the D word is now known, and that limited support is available for this 'disability' that has something to do with being bad at reading, spelling, writing. I have become more frustrated over the years, knowing perfectly well that there are many children who have gone undiagnosed mainly due to the lack of financial resources and lack of adequate training for teachers. As a result, many dyslexic children are isolated, misunderstood and shut out from the education they deserve.

I decided that it was one thing to stand up and talk about these issues, another to really do something about it. Five years ago I came up with an idea to start a charity that would radically change the way dyslexic people are perceived, that would move the dyslexia focus from 'disability' to 'ability' by championing the many dyslexic strengths and challenging negative self-beliefs. Our education system currently favours a one-size-fits-all approach to learning but every individual has different learning styles; and no – phonics is not the blanket answer to learning to decode the written word.

Along with Rosa Weber, who has worked with equal passion on this project since it was a twinkle of a thought and with the help of our benefactor George Koukis of Temenos, we formed our charity **NUword** last year. **NUword** believes that it's not the brain of the



person you should change, but the environment and method in which you educate them. Dyslexic brains are not deficient or less intelligent – they decode information in a different way, often, using images rather than words. Which is why visual thinking is one of our many skills and why so many of our best artists, film-makers, designers are dyslexic.

The need for early diagnosis is one of our main priorities, combined with a more holistic approach to the complex issues that surround dyslexia such as anxiety, depression, low confidence. Too many people are falling through the cracks, leaving school with few prospects and a traumatic, humiliating experience of education. If a child's dyslexia is not quickly identified and positively supported, we are at serious risk of neglecting their potential to achieve for the rest of their lives. Some will turn to crime, rather than writing a job application because they cannot read and write to the standard expected.

Thus two of our main aims for 2018 are:

1. Pilot a Free Dyslexia Assessment Scheme for underprivileged children in London's poorest boroughs (sadly at the moment assessment costs are prohibitive ranging from £450 - £1000).
2. Continue our 'What If?' Dyslexia Workshops with prisons in the UK, encouraging new methods to boost literacy and to empower dyslexic prisoners so that they feel more confident to find employment or training when they leave prison.

For both of these projects, we aim to provide ongoing strengths-based support after the individual's initial assessment or workshop.

The more we see, the more we hear directly from our valuable dyslexic population, the more strongly we believe that this is a human rights issue. Children are our future; imagination is the fuel of our nation; dyslexia must be celebrated and understood for the multi-faceted gift that it is.

You can find out more about **NUword** and donate at www.nuword.org

Sally Gardner's latest novel **My Side of the Diamond** is published by Hot Key Books, 978-1-4714-0643-0, £9.99 pbk.

Authorgraph

No.228

Liz Kessler

Interviewed by Michelle Pauli

‘Emily’s taken on a life of her own and I’m very grateful that she chose me,’ says Liz Kessler. With the **Emily Windsnap** series selling five million copies worldwide, a seventh book just out, huge popularity in the States and a film adaptation in the pipeline, Kessler’s enchanting young character has built up a momentum that belies her uncertain beginnings.

Emily Windsnap, an ordinary girl on land who turns into a mermaid in the sea, began her life as a poem, idly dreamt up by Kessler as a distraction from the work she was supposed to be doing on her novel-writing MA course. She then nearly became a picture book until renowned publisher David Fickling stepped in and suggested her story should be a middle grade novel. **The Tale of Emily Windsnap** and a two-book deal with Orion was the result. It then turned into a series, partly thanks to the enthusiasm of 200 year-six girls on a school visit who urged Kessler to continue Emily’s story rather than write something completely new.

For Kessler, there is something almost mystical about Emily’s origins and the way each story comes to life. ‘I think there is some way in which these characters and stories exist,’ she explains, ‘and I do believe that my job isn’t making something up but finding the right ways to have a relationship with a story so that it will open up to me, to discover where it is and then hopefully do it and the characters justice by telling it. If you do that, I feel that the character will keep opening up to you.’

There is also an element of the unknown in the magical underwater realm that the St Ives-based author explores in the books. ‘Water is most of the planet and we know so little about it. Mermaids represent that possibility of all the things that we don’t know, that might exist but in our arrogance we say do not. But we don’t know a fraction of it. That’s what excites me,’ she says.

More prosaically, the settings of the **Emily Windsnap** books, with delicious descriptions of gorgeous watery locations, are based on places that Kessler has yearned to visit and now has a fine reason to do so.

‘I joke about the fact that I take my research seriously but I do go to wherever the books are set’ she says. ‘I went to Bermuda and snorkelled and sat on the beach to write notes in my notebook so everything in the second book comes out of me being underwater, looking at these beautiful fish and describing them. In the **Land of the Midnight Sun** I went on a cruise in Norway and everything from that trip went straight into that book. I immerse myself in that world,’ she says.

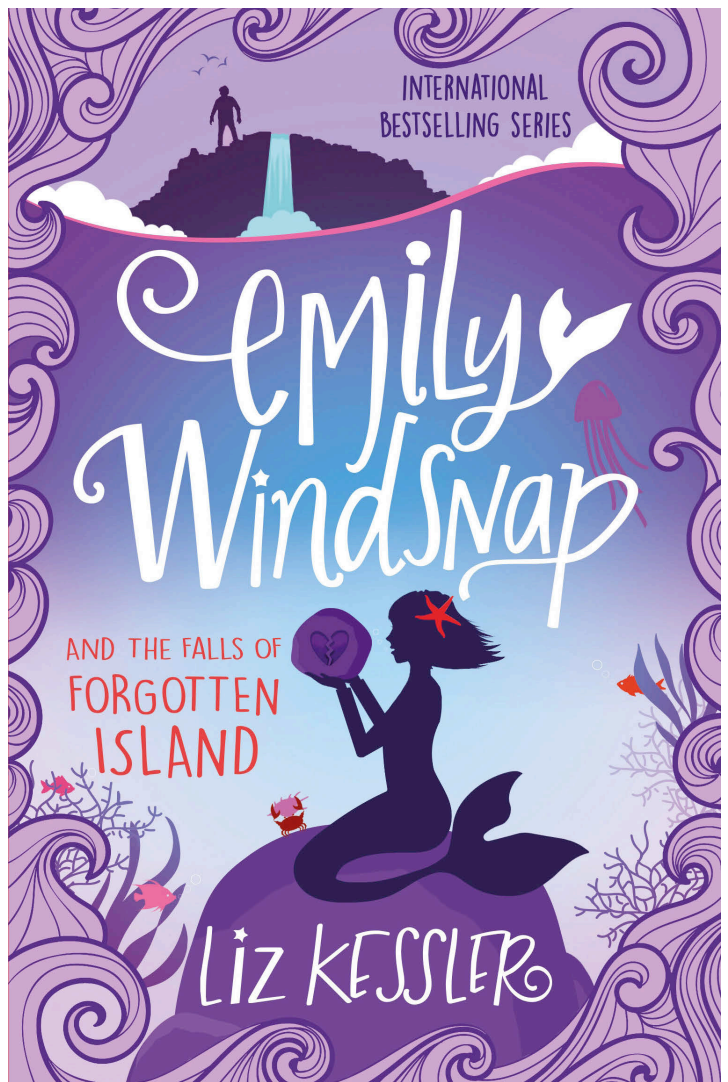
The breathtaking Niagara Falls, visited while on a book tour in the States, became the backdrop for **Emily Windsnap and the Falls of Forgotten Island**, in which Emily discovers a hidden world beyond a ‘massive, life-changing waterfall’ and finds herself suddenly entangled in an ancient prophecy. She has to embark on a dangerous mission to seek a legendary giant before it’s too late – which means breaking a vow of her own.

Like all the **Emily Windsnap** stories it’s a brilliant adventure tale, with much more going on beneath the surface – some of which is also a mystery to Kessler herself during the writing process. ‘I feel like on one level I know what I’m writing about and I know what I want to do but on a deeper level I feel like I never know what my books are about until I’ve finished and someone else tells me,’ she says. ‘Then I quite often realise that it was about something that either matters on a very deep level to me or in some way reflects

something that was going on at the time.’

It is certainly true that identity – and particularly seeking and resolving identity – is a theme running strongly through Kessler’s work, whether it’s Emily Windsnap reconciling her life as a human girl with her mermaid powers or Ash in Kessler’s powerful YA coming out tale, **Read Me Like a Book**. In fact, the two books might not be as far apart as they seem, as Kessler recalls how her brother alerted her to what he believed to be an underlying theme of **Emily Windsnap** – much to her surprise.

‘My brother said to me years ago, you know what Emily Windsnap’s about, don’t you? And I said, yeah, I wrote it, it’s about a girl who discovers she’s a mermaid. And he said, no, it’s actually an allegory for coming out as gay. And then he broke it down and he says, so, there’s a girl who discovers, just before her teens, this side to herself that she’d never realised before and she starts to acknowledge it. She’s scared everyone will call her names and then she comes out to her mum and she’s worried about what her mum will think. Then she stands up in Neptune’s Court and convinces him to change his laws so people can marry whoever they want. I was like, oh my god, I have and I didn’t realise it and it was never intended...’ Kessler finishes, laughing.





Communication and building bridges between communities is also a concern for Kessler and one that she highlights in **Emily Windsnap and the Falls of Forgotten Island**. She explains that, in a world of Brexit and Trump, in which communities are becoming increasingly fragmented and hostile to each other, she wanted to show that, if you can break down assumptions and stereotypes about other people, you can discover that, underneath, we have more in common than separates us.

This took on an added poignancy towards the end of the copyediting process in May 2017 when the Manchester arena was bombed with children the same age as Kessler's readership targeted. In a heartfelt dedication that mentions the terrorist attack, Kessler affirms her belief that the next generation has the power to overcome differences and spread love, kindness and empathy. It 'felt like a tiny platform to say a tiny thing, so I did', says Kessler.

Whatever the setting of the books and whatever the underlying themes, one element stays constant – friendship. Kessler is superb at pinpointing the intensity of the relationships between girls and the strong bonds of loyalty they hold. Never more so than in **Falls of Forgotten Island** where Emily, on holiday with both Aaron, her boyfriend, and Shona, her best friend, constantly struggles to give fair attention to each and is deeply concerned that Shona does not feel left out.

'I think Emily is a twelve-year-old, now thirteen-year-old, feminist,' says Kessler. 'I like to think of her instilling ideas of female loyalty in readers. It doesn't mean that she doesn't care about her boyfriend but, even in this fictional world, there's a recognition that friendships are possibly more permanent than a boyfriend. What's most essential about Emily is her strong desire for justice, speaking out and being true to herself and looking after her friends. Those things are always there.'

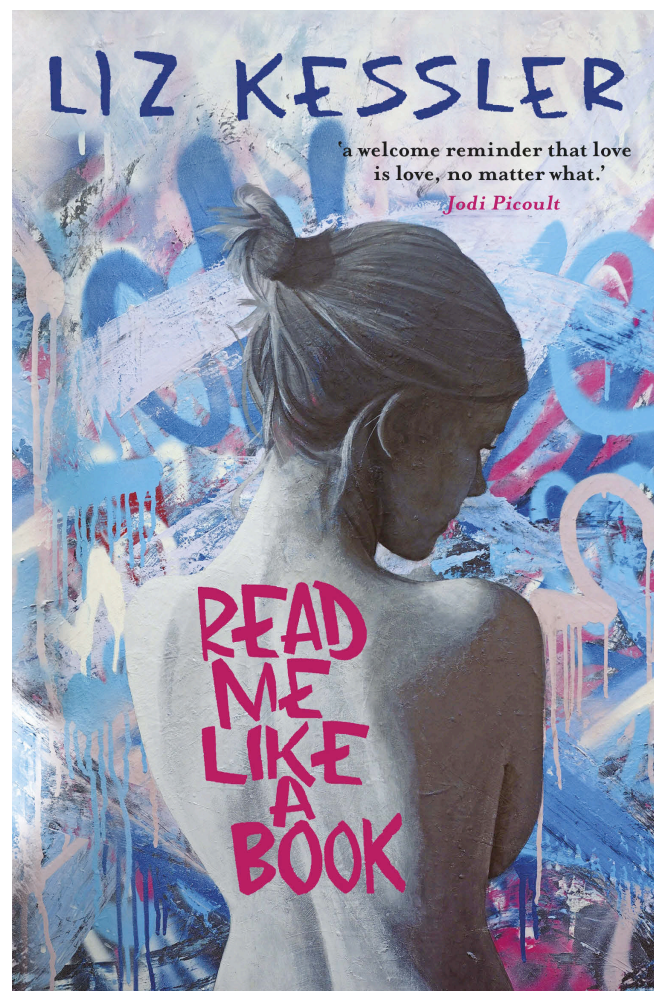
Kessler was writing poems when she was the age of the children who read the Emily books – and she shows school groups the piece of paper from a 1976 edition of the Manchester Evening News, where her first poem was published – and took an English degree at Loughborough University, but she didn't write seriously until she was in her early 30s. She tried teaching and journalism, then teaching English and media studies in a sixth form, but felt she was helping

others to make creative choices while missing out on being creative herself. One day, something changed.

'I had this epiphany really,' she explains. 'It was a weekend away with my mum and we were doing Julia Cameron's **The Artist's Way** and there's an exercise in there called Fantasy Lives. The idea is that you write down five lives you would have if you didn't have the one you have now. So I did it with my mum and hers were all things like, I'd be a backing singer in a gospel band, I'd be a fairy in the woods, she did it properly [laughs] and I looked at mine and it basically said 'writer' five times. It was as simple as that. It was like I'd remembered what I'd always meant to do. I packed in my job, did various freelance things, managed to get onto an MA in novel writing and I was off.'

As for Emily's future, there's an eighth book on the horizon and beyond that it is, of course, down to Emily. Kessler had once firmly intended to finish the series at book five but 'I think, if there's an appetite for these stories and I enjoy writing them and my publisher wants to keep publishing them then I am fine with that,' she now says. 'I hope that if it comes to a point where I've run out of ideas and no one wants to read them any more then I'll realise that and stop doing them but if that doesn't happen then I'm having fun with them and, hopefully, Emily is as well.'

The **Emily Windsnap** books, including the forthcoming story **Emily Windsnap and the Falls of the Forgotten Island** (978-1510102323), are published by Orion Children's Books.



Michelle Paul is a freelance writer and editor specialising in books and education. She created and edited the **Guardian** children's books site.

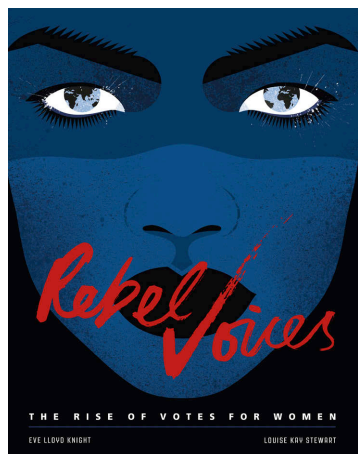
Ten of the Best Suffragette Stories

Nikki Gamble chooses.

'We're not daughters and wives, we're humans with lives.'

This year marks the centenary of two landmarks in the women's movement: women's suffrage in the UK (householders over 30) and the Parliament Act (Qualification of women) allowing women to stand for election. 2018 is time to celebrate a century of struggle and achievement across the globe, as women have fought for and won not only for the right to vote, but also the right to have a say in the running of their own and their country's affairs.

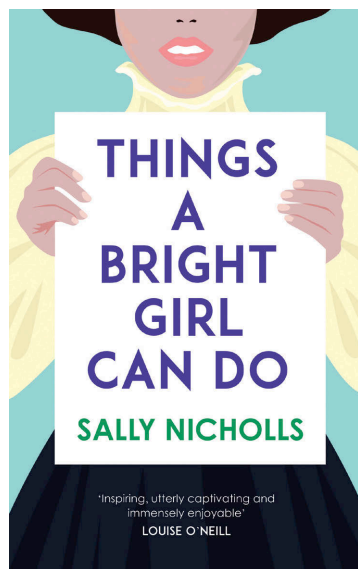
This book list showcases 10 recently published books, which either highlight the achievements of suffragists or are written in the spirit of the pioneering women who strove for recognition and equality.



Rebel Voices

Eve Lloyd Knight and Louise Kay, Wren & Rook, 978-1-5263-0023-2, £12.99 hbk

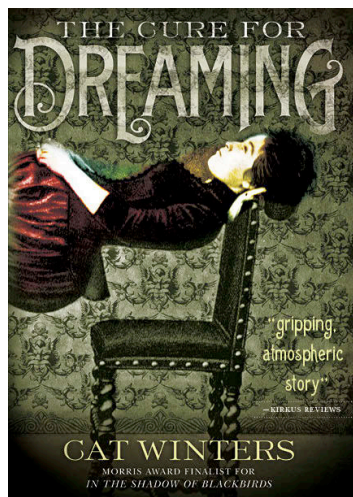
Although the story of Emmeline Pankhurst and the Suffragette movement is well-known, the campaign started beyond the borders of the United Kingdom. **Rebel Voices** charts the history of Votes for Women across the world from the trailblazers in New Zealand (1893) to most recent victories in the Middle East. The striking graphic style illustrations make this a book to inform and delight. It is packed with fascinating insights, revealing for instance that New Zealand was unusual in granting equal rights to settlers and indigenous people; in other countries the struggle for native populations has often been more protracted.



Things a Bright Girl Can Do

Sally Nicholls, Andersen Press, 978-1783445257, £12.99 hbk

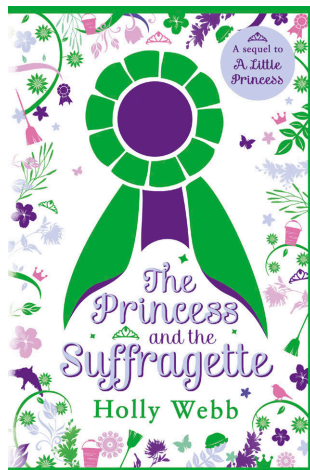
The Suffrage Movement in Britain is the subject of Sally Nicholls' compelling novel, **Things a Bright Girl Can Do**. Taking inspiration from novels of the day, this is an epic story which is both enlightening and engrossing. The story follows three young women from very different backgrounds as they join the 'Votes for Women' fight, find friendship and discover love. Nicholls writes with a respect for history and this novel is packed with authentic details, but the history doesn't impede the storytelling. An absolute must read. Ideal for readers 14+.



The Cure for Dreaming

Cat Winters, Amulet Books, 978-1419712166, £10.99 hbk

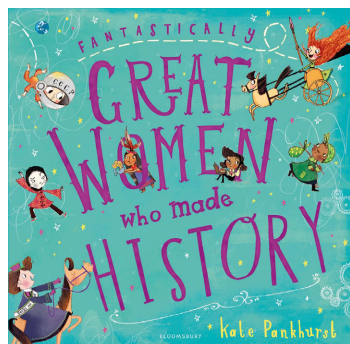
Another YA read, this time set in Oregon in 1900, **The Cure for Dreaming** is Cat Winters' enigmatic, paranormal story. Headstrong book loving Olivia Mead is a suffragist who dreams of going to college. Convinced that his daughter is on a path to destruction, Cat's father engages a hypnotist to cure her of what he perceives to be unladylike behaviour. The results of the hypnosis are shocking. Cat is left with an ability to read the inner thoughts of everyone she meets but she is also cursed with the loss of speech. Eventually, she wins the support of hypnotist, Henri Reverie, reverses her hypnotic state, gains her freedom and finds her voice. A disquieting read in which Cat's induced trance state is a metaphor for her political and social oppression.



The Princess and the Suffragette

Holly Webb, Scholastic, 978-1-4071-7085-5, £9.99 hbk

Holly Webb's **The Princess and the Suffragette** is a delightful fiction choice for readers from about 9+. A sequel to Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*, this story is set in Miss Minchin's school for young ladies. Lottie, aged 10 a minor character for the original book has transformed from a simpering child to an altogether more assertive and fiery girl. She develops a close relationship with one of the serving maids and inspired by the actions of Emmeline Pankhurst and Emily Davison the friends are drawn into exploits of the suffrage movement.



Fantastically Great Women who Made History

Kate Pankhurst, Bloomsbury Children's Books, 978-1-4088-7698-5, £6.99 pbk

The vision of the Suffragists went beyond achieving the vote, which they saw as the means of effecting positive social change. The contribution that women have made to history is brought

to the fore in Kate Pankhurst's **Fantastically Great Women who Made History**, the follow-up to the hugely successful **Fantastically Great Women who Changed the World**. The profiles include some less well-known subjects such as suffragette Flora Drummond and it is good to see wide cultural reach with names such as Qiu Jin the Chinese revolutionary and feminist mentioned alongside Sayyida al Hurra, the Queen of Tetouan. The bright design and humorous illustration make this an appealing choice for junior readers.



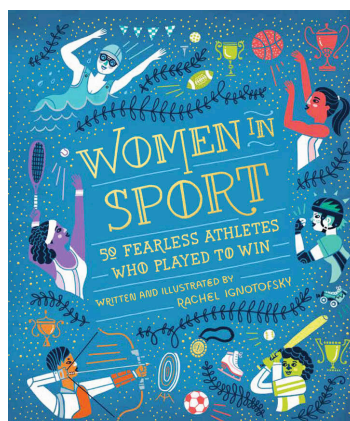
War Girls

Andersen Press, 978-1-7834-4060-3, £7.99 pbk

An analysis of periods when women's rights have advanced shows a relationship of progress to times of turmoil. It is significant that the success for women's suffrage in Britain came shortly after the First World War, when it became abundantly clear that women were able to do the same work as men.

War Girls is an excellent short story collection with contributions from writers such as Adele Geras, Mary Hooper, Melvin Burgess and Berlie Doherty. From various perspectives, the heroines in these fine stories are

nurses, drivers, spies, entertainers, and illustrate how women's lives were shaped and changed by The Great War.



Women in Sport

Rachel Ignatofsky, Wren & Rook, 978-1-5263-6092-2, £12.99 hbk

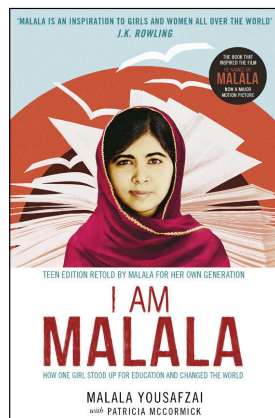
The struggle for equality continues today in many spheres of life including sport. **Women in Sport**, Rachel Ignatofsky's follow up to the successful **Women in Science**, is a collection of inspiring profiles covering women's sport from the 1800s to the present day. Tennis player Serena Williams and broadcaster Clare Balding rub shoulders Paralympian Tanni

Grey-Thomson and long-distance swimmer Gertrude Ederle whose words could be the battle cry for all women's rights campaigners: 'When someone tells me I can't do something, that's when I do it!' This design-led book is a visual treat that children will want to pore over and revisit many times.

I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World

Malala Yousafzai and Patricia McCormick, Orion Children's Books, 978-1-7806-2216-3, £7.99 pbk

Education for girls and women was regarded as an important goal for the suffragists. Sadly, universal education is still to be achieved in some parts of the world. Malala Yousafzai's story is the most powerful reminder of how perilous it can be to protest. There are many recently published books about Malala including the



picture book **Malala's Magic Pencil** for young readers. But for this list I have chosen **I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World** which not only captures Malala's brave spirit but is a testament to the support and encouragement given by her equally brave father and his determination to provide education for girls. With so many achievements to honour, it could be easy to forget that girls and young women today are still socialised into norms of behaviour. The final two books in my selection invite children today to see the many opportunities that are open to them.



What Are You Playing At?

Marie-Sabine Roger and Anne Sol, Alanna Books, 978-1-9078-2502-6, £12.99 hbk

What Are You Playing At? is an outstanding non-fiction book, which is suitable for all ages from 3 upwards. Presented in a simple question and response, format this book invites readers to challenge messages that they receive whether intentionally or unintentionally through marketing and media. What makes

this book particularly noteworthy are the photographs showing men and women in a range of jobs. We read, 'Girls do not play with cars, that would be silly' then turn the flap to see a female racing driver. This book is as empowering for boys as it is for girls and reminds us that both genders suffer when society has set expectations about the roles they are destined to fulfil.



Strong is the New Pretty

Kate Parker, Workman Publishing, 978-0-7611-8913-8, £13.99 pbk

And finally to the testimony of the children themselves, **Strong is the New Pretty** subtitled 'a celebration of girls being themselves' is a collection of arresting photographic portraits with quotations from girls aged 6 – 18. Organised in chapters with titles such as Confident is Strong, Determined is Strong, Kind is

Strong, Independent is Strong, this book provides evidence of lots of ways to be a strong female in the twenty-first century. Have it as a coffee table book in a school staffroom, or use the photographs to initiate discussion with your own child. Wouldn't it be wonderful if those suffragists of 100 years ago could travel in time to see what the girls in this book are achieving today? We have a lot to thank them for, so let's share the books and celebrate the legacy!



Nikki Gamble is Director of **Just Imagine Story Centre** and Associate Consultant at the **University of London, Institute of Education**.

Beyond the Secret Garden?

In this new series for **Books for Keeps**, **Darren Chetty** and **Karen Sands-O'Connor** discuss how Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic voices have been represented in our national story of children's literature, and how we can bring about change.

Part One: The Fantasy of Story

Raymond Williams, in his essay, 'Culture is Ordinary,' commented that 'The making of a society is a finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact and discovery, writing themselves into the land' (54). In this new column, we want to look at how children's books can 'write themselves into the land' and become part of the national story—and also how and why those books that try to go 'beyond the Secret Garden' often find themselves up against a seemingly insurmountable wall.



British children's literature rose and gained prominence along with the rise of the British Empire; it therefore found its way onto bookshelves throughout the world. The 'common meanings and directions' of stories for British children made white middle-class British children, from Alice to Mary Lennox to C. S. Lewis's Pevensie children, into inheritors of a great tradition, one in which the secrets of power could be found in (or in Alice's case, under) England's green and pleasant land. The repetition of this same story—white, middle-class Briton gains money/power/status by reclaiming the land—normalizes this idea in the mind of readers. 'We learn so many things from reading stories,' Darren writes in his chapter in **The Good Immigrant**, 'The problem is that, when one of these conventions is that children in stories are white, English and middle-class, then you may come to learn that your own life doesn't qualify as subject material' (99). BAME readers repeatedly learn that their place is, at best, helper to the white character (Robinson Crusoe's Man Friday is an early example; another is Ram Dass in Frances Hodgson Burnett's **A Little Princess**, who returns the white child Sara to her former place in the economic hierarchy while remaining a servant); at worst, they are in opposition to all that is right and good (Enid Blyton's dirty 'gypsy' characters or C. S. Lewis's dark-skinned crusaders against the white Christian Pevensie royalty).

In the secret garden of the canon, BAME children rarely get a look in. Many initiatives have worked to address this (see for example #WeNeedDiverseBooks and Rudine Sims Bishop's much-quoted work on books as mirrors, windows and sliding doors). While BAME readers need books in which they can see themselves, it's also important to challenge the idea that books with BAME characters are only for BAME readers. *All* children deserve to have literature that opens up the world in all its complexity.

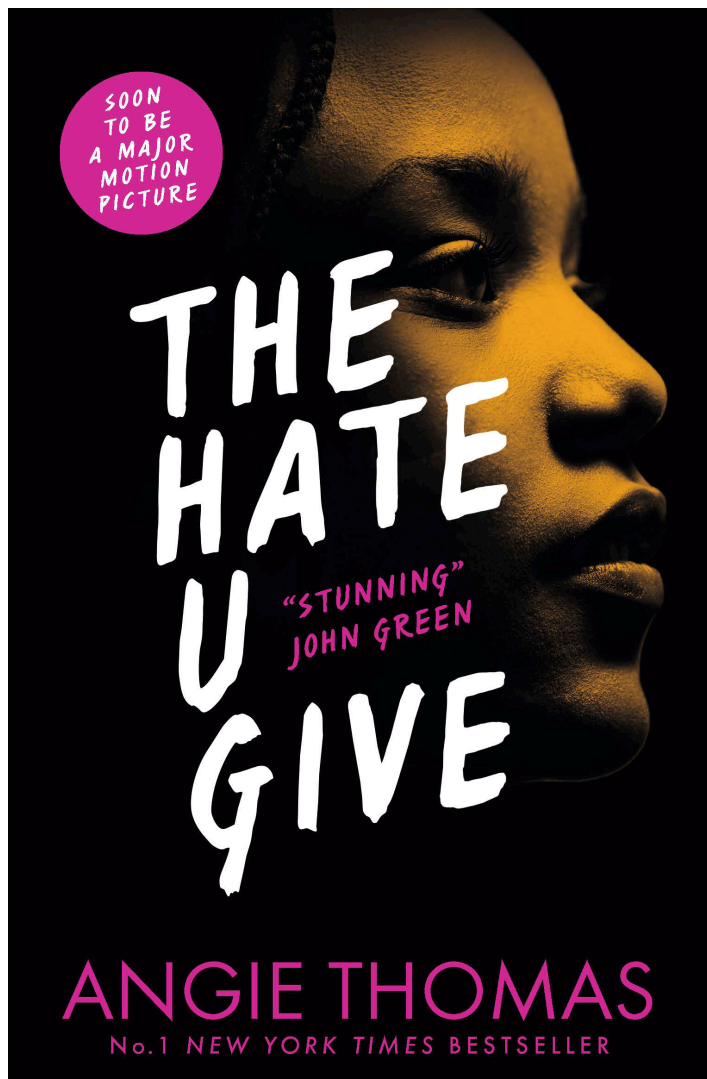
All children deserve to have literature that opens up the world in all its complexity.

To offer a specific example, in **The Hate U Give** (2017), Angie Thomas writes about sixteen-year-old Starr who 'lives in two worlds: the poor neighbourhood where she was born and raised and posh high school in the suburbs' (back cover blurb). Starr's father compares the gangs in their neighbourhood to the school houses in **Harry Potter**, Starr comments,

'Okay, so it is a good theory. Daddy claims the Hogwarts houses are really gangs. They have their own colors, their own hideouts, and they are always riding for each other, like gangs. Harry, Ron, and Hermione never snitch on one another, just like gangbangers. Death Eaters even have matching tattoos. And look at Voldemort. They're scared to say his name. Really, that "He Who Must Not Be Named" stuff is like giving him a street name. That's some gangbanging shit right there.

"Ya'll know that make a lot of sense," Daddy says. "Just 'cause they was in England don't mean they wasn't gangbanging." (Thomas 2017:165)

Thomas shows Starr's father engaging in an activity familiar to many black people and people of colour – translating a mainstream narrative into a particularity closer to home. Immediately before this passage, Starr quotes her father's regular question when they watch **Harry Potter**. "Why don't they shoot that nigga Voldemort?" Thus the translation that follows is introduced in a light-hearted tone – African-American Vernacular English is brought to bear on quintessentially British Hogwarts. Nonetheless 'it is a good theory'. Race isn't explicitly referenced in the passage. However, the four characters mentioned are all racialised as white, lending "just 'cause they was in England" a potentially racialised subtext along with the obvious national one. Equally, gang membership in the US is a multiracial phenomenon but



is most commonly associated in the public imagination with young black males. Indeed, the book's title is taken from Tupac Shakur's maxim 'Thug Life' – tattooed on his torso and said by him to stand for 'The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody'.

The critical reading offered by Starr's father highlights themes present in both the **Harry Potter** series and **The Hate U Give**; loyalty, belonging, , and overcoming fear. Thomas demonstrates that whilst these two stories have settings that differ in terms of race, class and nationality, 'universal themes' are found in both books. Given that she is writing for a YA audience, including both black and white readers, this passage acts as a way of communicating to a white audience how to translate a text and identify universal themes. Thomas as a black writer centering black characters cannot afford to alienate white readers, not just because of book sales, but because her novel is born out of a determination to humanise black men shot dead by the police. Whilst Starr is the novel's focaliser, Starr's father's theory viewed in the opposite direction gives readers more familiar with Harry Potter than life in poor black neighborhoods a point of access. Thomas writes of the continued significance of racialised difference and at the same time acknowledges commonalities and the possibility of understanding across difference.

Like Thomas, Wheatle anchors his realism with canonical British fantasy

Thomas's use of Rowling's books indicates the global reach of the conventions of British fantasy. It is unusual, however, for BAME-authored or centered books to have that global reach. Guardian children's fiction prize-winner Alex Wheatle's books, for example, are not currently published in the United States, one of the largest



Angie Thomas

YA markets in the world. The US media market, like its British counterpart, tends to favour the 'ordinary' vision of nostalgia England; reading British children's and YA books published in the US would convince any American reader that a non-white person in Britain was a mistake, an anomaly, or a force of evil. But Wheatle, like Thomas, writes realistic fiction about the effect of gangs, poverty and institutional indifference (if not hostility) on the lives of British young people. And like Thomas, Wheatle anchors his realism with canonical British fantasy. In **Crongton Knights**, the main character McKay keeps 'my **Lord of the Rings** DVDs sitting next to my **King Arthur and the Round Table** stories' (77). **Crongton Knights** even begins with a map, similar to classic fantasy novels, like Tolkien's, that include maps to give a sense of reality and history to their created world. Wheatle's map, complete with castles, and his characters' connection to a British past of quests, kings and conquering evil forces, links readers familiar with fantasy to his stories, while at the same time connecting readers familiar with contemporary urban life to canonical British fantasy. In so doing, he expands the definition of who belongs in British children's literature. This is critical for BAME readers, because the 'bit of earth' that is England belongs to all its readers.



Karen Sands-O'Connor is professor of English at SUNY Buffalo State in New York. She has, as Leverhulme Visiting Professor at Newcastle University, worked with **Seven Stories, the National Centre for the Children's Book**, and has recently published **Children's Publishing and Black Britain 1965-2015** (Palgrave Macmillan 2017).



Darren Chetty is completing a PhD at **UCL Institute of Education** and teaching on the BA Education Studies course, and has nearly 20 years of experience in primary education.

Winnie-the-Pooh: a classic of collaboration

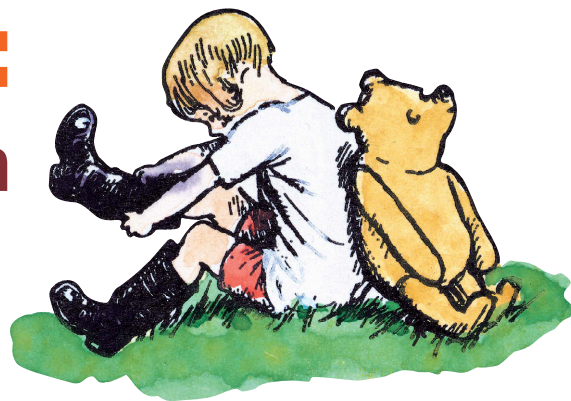
Original drawings of **Winnie-the-Pooh** are on display at the **V&A** for the first time in nearly 40 years as part of the UK's largest ever exhibition on Winnie-the-Pooh, A.A. Milne and E.H. Shepard. In particular **Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic** examines the thrilling interplay between text and illustration, shedding new light on the creative collaboration between Milne and Shepard, as curators **Emma Laws** and **Annemarie Bilcough** explain.

The concept of illustration as visual storytelling is particularly important in books for children; while listening to the words and looking at the pictures, they are essentially participating in the narrative process. In the **Winnie-the-Pooh** storybooks, the interplay between text and image plays a crucial role in imparting the narrative. Already in 1928, one contemporary reviewer for the New York Times described A.A. Milne and E.H. Shepard 'as indispensable one to the other as Sir John Tenniel and Lewis Carroll'.

The story of the two men's collaboration began in 1924 when a mutual friend, E.V. Lucas, suggested to E.H. Shepard that he might illustrate Milne's verse book **When We Were Very Young**. Although Milne and Shepard knew of the other's work, they had not actually met. Their first meeting in 1924 seems to have gone well, as Milne sent Shepard a short note of thanks: 'If you are always as jolly and as crack right as this, I shall consider myself very lucky in my collaboration.' It seems from letters exchanged between them that Milne took a close interest in the illustration process, having the illustrations returned to him with each batch of verses and occasionally replying with suggestions for new ones.

By the time Milne was writing his storybook **Winnie-the-Pooh**, Shepard was accepted as the man who would illustrate it, although J.H. Dowd had illustrated the first story when it appeared in the *Evening News* on 24 December 1925, and Alfred E. Bestall the second for Eve: *The Lady's Pictorial* (10 February 1926). Milne wrote to Shepard: 'So I have now promised [Lucas] & [Daphne?] a 'Winnie-the-Pooh' book. I don't know if you have heard of this animal – Christopher Robin's bear. It began with a story in the *Evening News* (illustrated not very well by Dowd); & went on with one in Eve (illustrated very well by Bestall). I hope you have seen neither, for your own sake. I have since written two more – now being typed. I propose a book of 12 such stories, illustrated by E.H. Shepard, bless him.'

It was important to Milne that Shepard base his illustrations of the characters on Christopher's own toys and he invited Shepard to his home in Chelsea in June 1926: 'But I think you must come here on Thursday, if only to get Pooh's and Piglet's likeness'. In **Winnie-the-Pooh**, Milne offers the reader no description of his protagonists. He leaves it to Shepard to introduce – *visually* – both Christopher Robin and Edward Bear, his teddy, as they come down the stairs – 'bump, bump, bump'; the result is one of the most familiar and best-loved of the **Pooh** illustrations. While Shepard's portraits of Christopher's toys inspire his character vignettes, he distils their general appearance



into outlines and animates them. Occasionally, the odd leg seam betrays their origins. Milne and Shepard continued to exchange ideas in letters and met regularly for Sunday lunch or tea at Cotchford Farm, the Milnes' weekend cottage in East Sussex.

The imagined world of **Winnie-the-Pooh** is a curious fusion of fantasy and reality, conjured from the real landscapes of Ashdown Forest near Cotchford Farm. Milne rarely describes the Forest in his stories; instead, Shepard visualises it for the reader. Just as with the toy portraits, Milne was keen for Shepard to see the Forest and they took walks there together several times. Shepard returned again in 1928 to draw, for example, the pine trees at Gills Lap, which inspired the 'Enchanted Place' in *The House at Pooh Corner*. For the famous plan of 100 Aker Wood used for the endpapers to **Winnie-the-Pooh**, Milne sent Shepard a plan of the topography of his corner of Ashdown Forest and suggested that Shepard place the characters in front of their houses.

Shepard's full-page landscapes play a central role in the scene setting. Milne was evidently appreciative of them since he even altered his text to accommodate the illustration of Eeyore with his tail in the stream when Shepard mistakenly provided a full-page illustration instead of a small vignette.

Excerpts from **Winnie-the-Pooh** appeared first in *The Royal Magazine* and Milne and Shepard worked closely with Frederick Muller at Methuen to arrange the layout of the magazine spreads. Some designs made their way into the published book; it was the



A. A. Milne and Christopher Robin, ca. 1925-1926



magazine spread, for example, that prompted the increased height of the arc of bees buzzing above Pooh's head and arrangement of the text 'He climbed and he climbed' to mirror his ascent of the oak tree. Both Milne and Shepard contributed ideas to the page design; Milne in his manuscript introduced the idea of bouncing words to illustrate Piglet bouncing in Kanga's pouch, while it was Shepard who planned the layout of the friends pulling Pooh out of Rabbit's door.

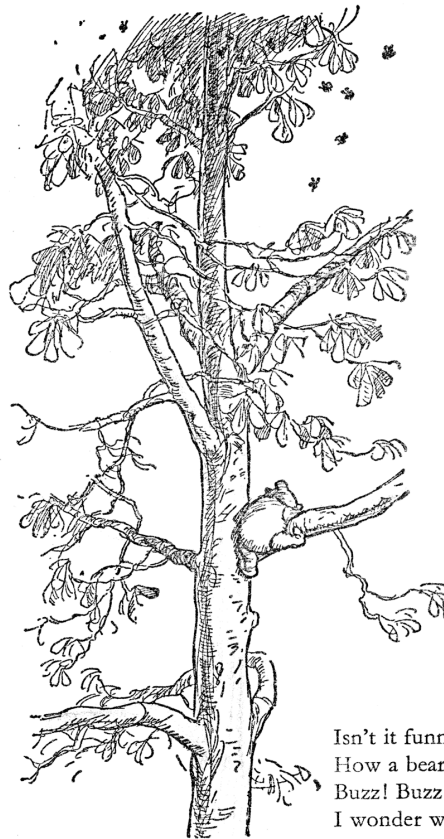
Preliminary pencil sketches, and the pen and ink drawings developed from them, demonstrate Shepard's vigorous draughtsmanship, keen observation, understated humour and delightful evocation of movement and character. Ultimately, however, it is Shepard's highly inventive response to Milne's text that singles him out.

Throughout the books, Shepard's illustrations punctuate the text and alter the pace of Milne's narrative; in particular, sequences of vignettes prolong the action and contribute to the humour, as when the tablecloth appears to wriggle, wrap itself in a ball and roll across the room. At times, the illustrations replace the text in the storytelling and can be read with or without the text, as when Piglet makes his perilous climb up the string to the letterbox in the ceiling of Owl's collapsed house.

Shepard's illustrations also expound details within the text, helping to visualise Milne's wordplay; even the most experienced readers may initially be bemused by the reference to Eeyore, 'sitting down on THE WOLERY'. He had a genius for interpreting text ironically – Christopher Robin's 'Sustaining Book', open at the word 'Jam', offers nutritional rather than spiritual sustenance to the 'Wedged Bear in Great Tightness'. Shepard also visually emphasizes Eeyore's sarcasm; as Eeyore declares 'it isn't so Hot in my field about three o'clock in

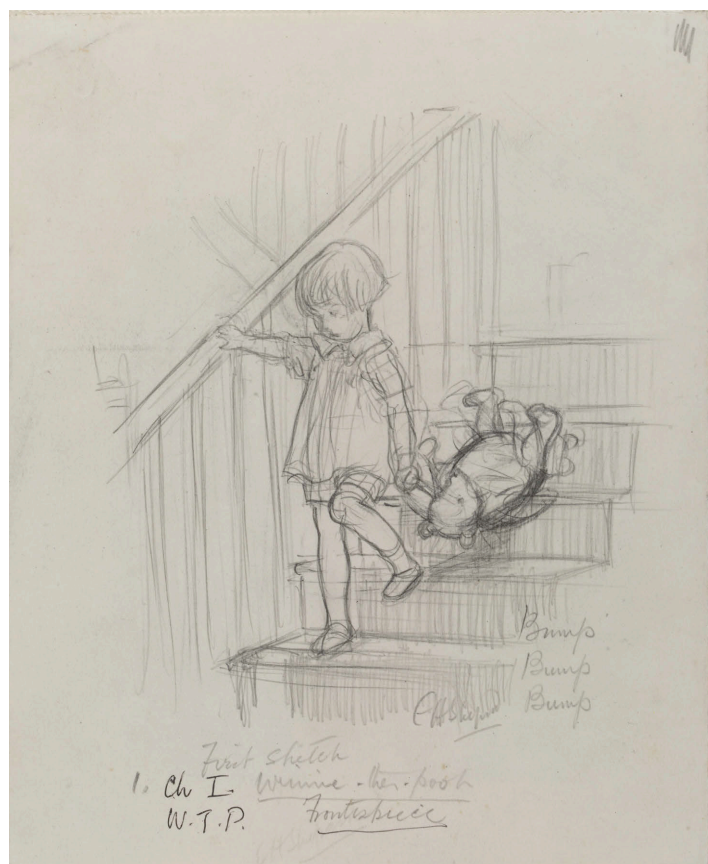
WE ARE INTRODUCED

5



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himself.
It
went
like
this:

Isn't it funny
How a bear likes honey?
Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!
I wonder why he does?



the morning as some people think it is. It isn't Close, if you see what I mean – not so as to be uncomfortable, It isn't Stuffy', in a three-part image, he becomes visually overlaid with snow as his sentence progresses.

With a sense of humour similar to Milne's, Shepard could not resist adding jokes of his own, such as the little mouse who, when helping to free Pooh out of Rabbit's door, is faced with grabbing hold of a prickly hedgehog and thinks better of joining the effort. He also introduces little incongruities to add dramatic irony, the visual equivalent to the pantomime refrain, 'It's behind you!', letting readers in on a secret – when Pooh and Piglet build a house for Eeyore it is the illustration that reveals the real story – the two friends are shown in fact *dismantling* Eeyore's house of sticks before they go to rebuild it on the other side of the wood.

Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic is curated by Annemarie Bilclough and Emma Laws and runs until 8 April 2018. Tickets are £8 (concessions and family tickets available). V&A Members go free. Advance booking is advised – in person at the V&A; online at <https://www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/winnie-the-pooh-exploring-a-classic>; or by calling 0800 912 6961 (booking fee applies).

A new V&A publication, **Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic**, written by Annemarie Bilclough and Emma Laws, accompanies the exhibition. Copies are available in the exhibition shop and online at: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/shop/books/html>

Winnie-the-Pooh, The House at Pooh Corner and **When We Were Very Young** are published by Egmont, £14.99 each hbk.

Windows into illustration: Holly Sterling

Holly Sterling caught our eye with her first book **15 Things Not to do with a Baby** with its joyful representation of family life. On the publication of her fourth book, **15 Things Not to do with a Puppy**, she discusses her technique and approach

15 Things Not to do with a Puppy is the third book in a series, following **15 Things Not to do with a Granny** and **15 Things Not to do with a Baby**. The series is written by Margi McAllister and has a warm humour that I am drawn to.

15 Things Not to do with a Baby was my first illustrated picture book after leaving my Masters course at Edinburgh College of Art in 2012. Between then and now, I have evolved a lot as an illustrator, developing my working methods to suit the pace of the publishing industry.

The family illustrated in the books (who are based on my own family) have evolved as characters and have grown alongside their readers. Each book introduces new family members and situations, which keeps it exciting for me to illustrate. I feel like I know these characters so well, that they really are family to me!

I didn't meet Margaret until after the completion of the first book as all correspondence was managed by our publisher. We have however, had a very open relationship throughout the process of the other two books. We have both experienced an introduction of a puppy in our families and I think this has helped to make **15 Things Not to do with a Puppy** so believable.

Inspiration for the puppy came from watching my niece and her little dog interacting and becoming the best of friends. They also feature in my own book, **Hiccups!** I took photos for reference and used my observational sketches to develop character and movement in my work. I'm not the best sketchbook-keeper, it has to be said. I would much rather grab a piece of scrap paper to draw on, so that I am relaxed and don't become too precious with my work. This ensures a fresh and energetic quality.

After developing my characters, I start thumb-nailing using a soft pencil (usually 4B). This is when I consider the distribution of the text and situations across the 32-pages of a picture book. There isn't a narrative as such with the **15 Things** series, but I like to add extra elements into my illustrations that helps to provide a wider context. The reader can use these to create their own deeper narrative.





After this stage I will talk to my editor and art director about how we can strengthen any messages, and I will create more finalised roughs. There is still room for change at this point. They will also talk to Margi to make sure she is happy. I will then start on final artwork.

Over the years I have developed a mixed media method. I create line by using soft pencils, I use paints to create washes and I build a bank of textures and marks using a range of printing methods. I use the computer as a handy tool to combine all of these elements by layering them up - a very similar process to screen-printing. Working like this allows flexibility and control when it comes to editing.

Books illustrated by Holly Sterling, written by Margaret McAllister:
15 Things Not to Do with A Puppy 9781786030474 – published 1st February 2018

15 Things Not to do with A Granny (pbk) 97817847809131

15 Things Not to do with a Baby (pbk) 9781847807533

Written and illustrated by Holly Sterling:

Hiccups! (pbk) 9781847806758

All published by Lincoln Children's Books.

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Two Children Tell The Reality of Words

Virginia Lowe continues her series examining children's relationship with language, drawing on recorded observations of her own children's developing use and understanding of words.

The relationship between external reality and the language used to describe it is often said to be part of the child's concrete operational stage after about age seven. Any child who has heard a large proportion of their language applied only to stories rather than actual physical things, will understand words' arbitrary nature, much earlier.

Rebecca rarely asked about words she didn't know in stories, but would use the words in her play until she was quite sure of their meaning, then ask, out of context:

Rebecca: What does 'fortnight' mean? (for instance, from **Peter Rabbit**, Potter, she 2y5m or two years, five months). Her non-figurative drawing might be pronounced to be 'an abstract' but more often 'a gong gong' or some other neologism. 'I "swapped" me. That means when you bump your head' (2y7m) or 'I'm chambering - that means turning over the pages sideways' (2y10m). These were offered quite earnestly, as words to fill gaps she perceived in the English language. On another accession I told her to stop scratching at her rash. She answered hopefully "I'm not scratching, I'm honing. Is that all right?" (2y7m), this time with a grin, knowing that a renaming would hardly be accepted by her mother as legitimising the action.

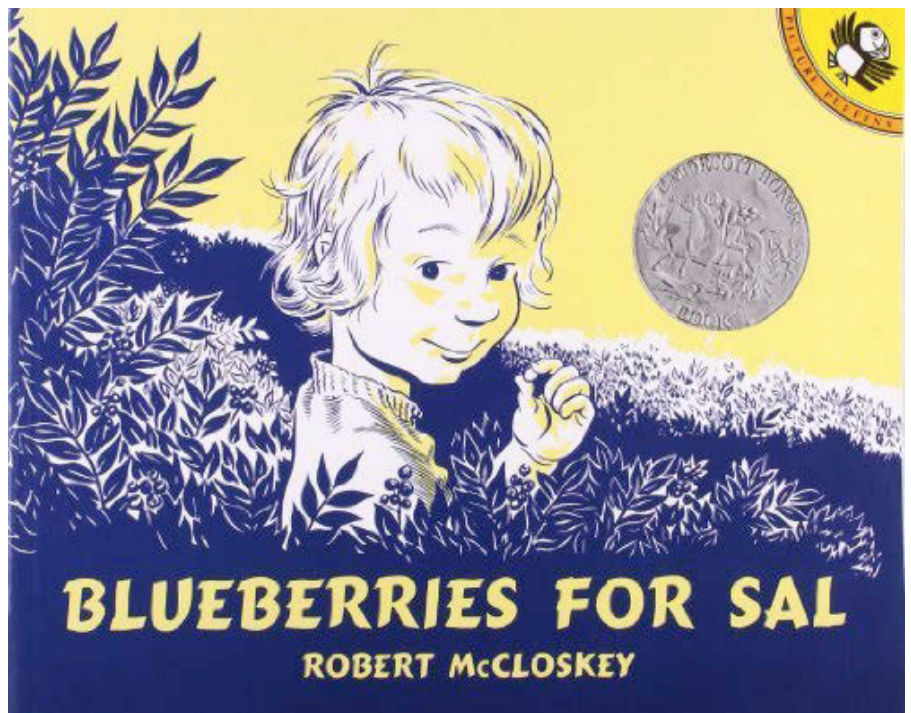
She was inspired by our readings of items from **Black's Children's Encyclopaedia** when it was new. She reproduced the register on and off for a whole evening: 'It was in 1978 that the name "pea" was invented. Before that they just ate peas without a name' (4y4m). By 4y9m names as words were quite clear in her mind. Her reply to my joke that I was bottling Nick (on my lap) for 'next winter' she replied

Rebecca: You can't. Nick's a little boy. You can't eat boys!
(pauses, thinking)

Rebecca: Nick's a boy's *name*. You can't bottle *names*!

There was even an awareness of style. At 4y11m, she was composing a story and dictating to me. When I read back to her 'Owls sleep in the day, and hoot up their hooting in the night', she laughed and said 'That sounds like something in Dr Seuss'.

Nick had been coached by Rebecca since at least 0y9m, when she explained to him (without his having asked of course) 'It's just nonsense, Little Man!' of a nursery rhyme. Before long, he seemed to understand that the non-pictured part of a book held the words. At 1y1m 'bird' was one of the few words he could say. I was reading a chapter book to Rebecca and the word 'bird' occurred. He at once came over and looked at the book, presumably to see the picture. However there was none on that opening so he pointed to the written text firmly and said 'bir', not as a question but as a statement. He was telling us that 'bir' was there in the writing, even if not in a picture. At 2y5m, from across the room he heard John's



loud rendition of a word in the novel he was reading to Rebecca and exclaimed to me 'Daddy read "crash"!'

By 2y6m he was able to use the concept of a 'word' to define what is real, what not. In an authorial-intrusive question, Dr Seuss asks 'Fish in a tree? How can that be?' Nick was hearing **Hop on Pop** for the first time in about a year. He gave the question serious consideration, rather than just laughing or saying it was impossible. He replied 'It's just a word!' His terminology shows that this was not a learned phrase. If asked, his parents' (and sibling's) response would have been that it was 'nonsense' and he knew the way the nonsense world is created. 'It's just a word'. On finding there is no cat and fiddle represented in Oxenbury's **Cakes and Custard** (from the library) Nick exclaimed 'But the words say it!'

These examples of the children's language awareness demonstrate their understanding that the relationship between words and the things they stand for is tenuous.

Books mentioned:

Black's Children's Encyclopaedia

Hop on Pop Dr Seuss, HarperCollins Children's Books

Blueberries for Sal Robert McCloskey, Puffin

Cakes and Custard, Helen Oxenbury

The Tale of Peter Rabbit, Beatrix Potter, Frederick Warne



Dr Virginia Lowe lives in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. She is the proprietor of **Create a Kids' Book**, a manuscript assessment agency, which also runs regular workshops, interactive writing e-courses, mentorships and produces a regular free e-bulletin on writing for children and children's literature generally. See www.createakidsbook.com.au for further details. Her book, **Stories, Pictures and Reality: Two Children Tell** (2007) is published by Routledge (978-0-4153-9724-7, £29.99 pbk).

Eleanor Farjeon 'books for keeps'

A book list by **Brian Alderson**

Mystery persists in these rough times as to why the third in what is now a long string of British children's book awards should be named after a writer whose work is largely forgotten – even by persons 'in the trade'. (At one of the recent **Eleanor Farjeon Award** ceremonies, I believe that Farjeon's literary executrix, Anne Harvey, was asked to explain to the attenders just who the good lady was.) Certainly there have been biographies, most notably by her friend, the librarian, Eileen Colwell, and her niece, Annabel Farjeon, but these tell us more about her character and the events of her long and 'wide-hearted' life than about how it manifested itself in the more than a hundred books that carry her name. I get the impression that investigating the bibliography is just too daunting for today's critics who may excuse themselves the effort on the practical grounds that the children's books of the first half of the twentieth century are of no consequence to our present enlightened times.¹

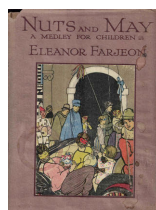
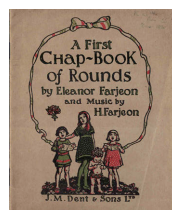
If you believe that 'books are for keeps' though, it is incumbent upon you to rescue each author – and especially one as prolific as Eleanor Farjeon – from generalised judgments as to their merit. Furthermore, given the growing diversity of design measures available to the makers of children's books from as far back as the 1840s, the physical presence of an individual volume can play a part in its literary character. (We don't need to go to the past for this – just look at a shelfful of Michael Rosen's effusions – but editorial and production standards, including methods of illustration were far less homogenized in Farjeon's days than now.)

Thus it is that, looking at her verses, selections of which have been occasionally reissued down to the present, we find more than a dozen original garnerings, each with a character of its own. The first significant volumes, some of whose contents were, like those later about Christopher Robin, from *Punch* came as the two books of **Nursery Rhymes of London Town** (1916-7) with chunky line drawings for child readers by Macdonald Gill. These often punning verses contrast in their topographical knowingness with two ventures that take us back to almost Victorian party-games with a *Chap-Book of Rounds*, in two parts, with music by her brother Harry, and **Singing Games for Children** (all 1919) which exhibit the whimsy that has always bedevilled her reputation ('self-conscious and insipid' said Iona Opie of the singing games).

At the same time, with **All the Way to Alfriston** (1918), there emerged a slim volume of six poems, steeped in a Georgian pastoralism, that set a course for much of the verse that was to follow and finds echoes down to the post (second) World War poems of such as James Reeves. 'Nursery rhymes of the Sussex Downs' were a favoured theme of much of this writing, owing much to a faux-ballad tradition. But the writing was, as Humphrey Carpenter said, 'deft' and the distinctive single volumes in which it appeared, along with their illustrations, allow a discrimination to be made between treatments of themes that may be soppy or repetitive or (much-loved word) 'retreatist' and their origin in an immediacy of feeling.

Space forbids an analysis, but a mere listing of stages in the oeuvre indicates the variety of impulses behind the whole. There were alphabet picture books, one of which, **The Town Child's Alphabet** (1924) was illustrated by David Jones, and another, **Perkin the Pedlar** (1932), combined verses and invented anecdotes about places from Appledore to Zeal Monarchorum and had striking lithographs by Clare Leighton. There was **Joan's Door** (1926), one

¹ An exception, confined to a now-vanished magazine, is Anne Harvey's authoritative. 13 page survey and bibliography in *Book and Magazine Collector* circa 1983



of the many examples of those collections that set out to imitate the Christopher Robin craze. There was the seasonal **Come Christmas** volume with wood engravings by Mollie McArthur (1927), whose utilitarian reprint in a larger format in 2000 shows how a reprint may suffer from re-origination. In the later, more extensive assemblages that followed, such as **Over the Garden Wall**, with its drawings by Gwen Raverat (1933) there is a more complete establishment of the 'Farjeon voice', while the sequence of verse-books **Cherrystones** (1942), **The Mulberry Bush** (1945), and **The Starry Floor** (1949), have fluent wispy drawings by Isobel and John Morton-Sale that add a rich suggestiveness to the implications of the texts.

1925 saw the emergence of Farjeon as storyteller for children with the first tale in Blackwell's new and intentionally 'superior' annual **Joy Street**. 'Tom Cobble' proved to be one of her best-known stories and may stand as an example of the wholesale use and re-use of many of the texts that followed. It was re-published by Blackwell as the first of their **Jolly Books**, a series (never I think examined) amounting to about seventy books, almost all being reprints in book-form of other stories from **Joy Street**. It also turned up as 'Tom Cobble and Ooney' as the first item in the daisy-chain of tales in **Martin Pippin in the Daisy-Field** (1937).

Grouping the tales, however disparate, within a frame, as being told by a central figure – an old nurse, say, or a sailor – was a favourite device. It allowed for second use of individual tales, either before or after the compilation, and for the preservation of texts in volume form, as, famously, with **The Little Book-Room** (1955), which drew upon several collections from the past. (Contrariwise, the stories for **Italian Peepshow** all first appeared together in the rare miscellany **Nuts and May**, worked on during her flight to Italy after the sadness of her miscarriage in 1925.)

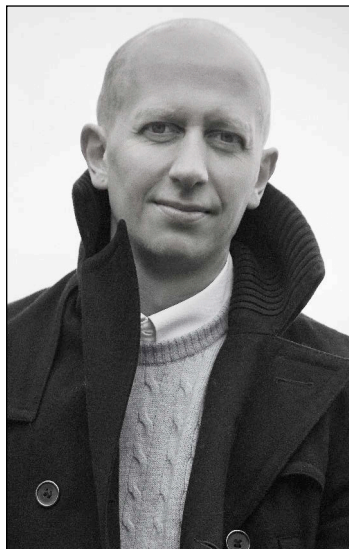
These often inter-related bundles of verses and stories form a publishing continuum within which other individual successes stand out: the ever-popular verses of **Kings and Queens** which she wrote with her brother Herbert (1936), the 400 page **New Book of Days** with its fine decorations by Philip Gough (1941 – a war-time marvel), and the Anglo-American collaboration with Helen Sewell on **Ten Saints** (1936 and 1953). The career was certainly distinctive of its time, and, given the praise that continued after **The Little Book-Room** won both the **Carnegie Medal** and the first **Hans Christian Andersen Award**, her many admirers among the children's book editors must have had her much in mind when, after her death in 1965, they considered the naming of an award for a contribution to children's literature. I wonder if the name of her near-contemporary Walter de la Mare ever crossed their minds?

This article is based on an illustrated talk given at Newcastle University in 2017.

Brian Alderson's interest in children's books began in 1954. He went on to teach Children's Literature in London for many years and is the former children's books editor of **The Times** (1967–1996). He founded the **Children's Books History Society** in 1969 and is the current President of the **Beatrix Potter Society** as well as a regular contributor to **Books for Keeps**. Brian won the **Eleanor Farjeon Award** in 1969 for his outstanding contribution to children's literature.

I wish I'd written...

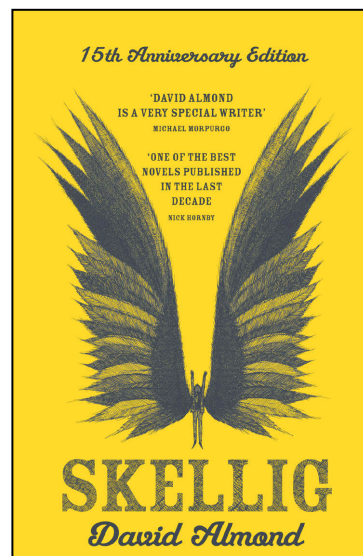
Piers Torday is lost in admiration for **Skellig**.



Piers Torday's latest book, **There May Be A Castle** (978-1-7842-9274-4) is published by Quercus Children's Books, £6.99 pbk

One of my great frustrations is that I seem incapable of writing a short book, and that books intended to be about one thing often end up running away to be about quite another. (This last is not uncommon, I know!) On both counts I am profoundly envious and lost in admiration for **Skellig** by David Almond.

This is a short book, at 170 odd pages, but it contains multitudes. The story is deceptively simple – about a boy discovering a mysterious visitor in the garage of his new home – but manages to be many great middle grade genres in one succinct, effortless and uplifting tale. It has the relevance of social realism but also the escapism of fantasy. It is visionary but also a compelling adventure mystery. I challenge anyone to read it and not be profoundly moved but the story throughout is leavened with wit and joy. And for extra bonus points, it is set in my beloved North East. Just who Skellig is remains ambiguous but what is never in any doubt, as in much great fiction, is the power of miracles.



Skellig (978-0-3409-4495-0) by David Almond is published by Hodder Children's Books, £7.99 pbk.

BfK

reviews

Books about Children's Books

Drawn from the Archive; Hidden Histories of Illustration

★★★★

Sarah Lawrance, with a foreword by Jacqueline Wilson, Walker, 128pp, 978-0-9928827-0-9 £9.99 pbk

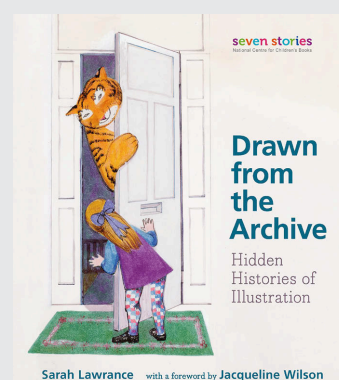
This beautifully produced book invites readers to step into the archive of **Seven Stories: the National Centre for the Children's Book** and explore the rich history of children's illustration documented therein. Representing 25 different illustrators from the 1930s to the present day, **Drawn from the Archive** offers an accessible introduction to the process of children's book illustration and the way it has evolved over time. Organised around key periods of British illustration – the 1930s-1950s, 1960s-1980s, and 1990s-2000s – it showcases material held in the Seven Stories archive. The book (and the archive) represent some of the leading lights of British illustration from each period, including Edward Ardizzone, Faith Jaques, John Burningham, Shirley Hughes and Pat Hutchins,

making this a delightful tour of the visual landscape of British childhoods over the last eighty years.

Each section introduces a single work by a notable illustrator and sets it in context, discussing biographical details about the illustrator (and sometimes the author of the work illustrated), the context of children's illustration at the time, and what is revealed by the materials in the archive. The book is filled with intriguing details: the entry on Ruth Gervis notes that when her editor commissioned her illustrations of **Ballet Shoes** she was unaware that Gervis was author Noel Streatfeild's sister, while the discussion of draft material for Bob Graham's **Jethro Byrde**, **Fairy Childe** points out the late removal of human hands shown offering a plate of cakes, deemed 'too fleshy and enormous'. Many of these details reveal the ideological cross-currents which shape children's books: the dummy book for Edward Ardizzone's **Tim and Charlotte** features a far more perilous storyline in the shape of criminals who try to falsely claim Charlotte (eventually

to be replaced with a tamer aunt). Sarah Garland was urged to change the endpaper illustrations for her book **Billy and Belle** because they showed parents of different races in bed together, on the grounds that the image would hamper the sale of international co-editions (Garland, to her credit, refused).

The richest aspect of this book is the insight it gives into how picture books are made, and how the process has changed over time. The section devoted to Pat Hutchins' **1 Hunter** clearly sets out the impact of the colour separation process: a comparison between the gouache painting of the three giraffes – produced early on in the development of the book – with the finished artwork – created ready for the printing process in the form of black line and four colour separations – illustrates how this process contributed to Hutchins' signature style. Yasmin Ismail's **Time for Bed, Fred!** illustrates how digital technologies have afforded illustrators new strategies such as the use of mixed media collage. The



excellent production quality of the book itself showcases the archive material to good effect.

For those new to thinking about children's book illustration, the book offers an appealing introduction to the evolution of the material book; for experts, it is a tantalising glimpse into the possibilities of the Seven Stories collection. A pleasing addition to a field which still has too few works devoted to children's book illustration. **LP**

Under 5s Pre – School/Nursery/Infant

Ed's Choice

Animals with Tiny Cat

★★★★★

Viviane Schwarz, Walker Books, 978-1-4063-7103-1, 32pp, £11.99 hbk

'To illustrate' – to shine a light on; traditionally this has been taken to mean that there has to be a text that requires enlightening. But this is not necessarily so and increasingly illustrators are moving away to illustrate ideas, emotions, to play. Viviane Schwarz is such an artist. Here her ability to conjure up ideas and character through line and minimal colour is perfectly displayed. The moment the book is opened, the reader meets Tiny Cat as he gambols, rolls, races, chases across not just the opening inside covers but as will be discovered, the final spreads. The mood is set. Tiny Cat is ready to play – and all conveyed through the energy of the artist's line. In a previous book Tiny Cat introduced us to numbers; here he is enjoying himself by dressing up as different animals. The concept is simple and reflects the world of the child reader; no real animals required just everyday objects. But even these



can be scary. Tiny Cat has the answer – he can be a big cat and roar.

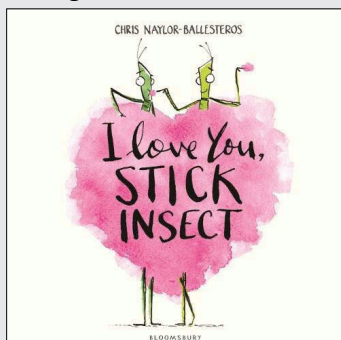
There is no clutter, no unnecessary detail, Schwarz places her little cat against a plain white background which ensures that the reader cannot but help engage with the action and enjoy Tiny Cat's expressions while almost certainly joining in with the sounds each animal makes. This is a picture book to enjoy from the front cover to the end – and to return to again and again to join in the fun. Brilliant. **FH**

I Love You, Stick Insect

★★★★★

Chris Naylor-Ballesteros, Bloomsbury Children's Books, 32pp, 978-1-4088-6991-8, £11.99, hbk

It's impossible not to love the irrepressible stick insect star of Chris Naylor-Ballesteros' picture book. All legs and enthusiasm he bounds into the book to declare extravagant love for 'the most beautiful stick insect' he has ever seen. A rather more sanguine butterfly is at hand to point out that the object of his affection is in fact simply a stick, something that will have been immediately apparent to sharp-eyed young readers. This doesn't stop our hero dreaming of a loved-up future in which he and his darling have fun and laughter and live happily ever after. In his imagination, and over a series of vibrant spreads bursting with movement, we see the



two of them enjoying various outings – to the seaside, surfing, skating, on motorbikes and even dancing the hula (two or three hoops each). Each page builds on the silliness, composition and layout enhancing the comedy and surprise delivered by each spread, until the moment we have been expecting arrives, and the scales fall from the lovestruck insect's eyes. It's a lesson for us all perhaps on the pitfalls of blind infatuation, but mostly it's a book that delights with its sheer unconquerable vivacity. Chris Naylor-Ballesteros is an illustrator to watch. **MMA**

The Stone Bird

★★★★★

Jenny McCarthy, illus, Patrick Benson, Andersen Press, 978-1-7834-4550-9, £11.99 hbk

Eliza and her mother live very near the sea, and one day she finds a stone on the beach. It fits into her hand perfectly, and she knows it is an egg. Her mother says it's too heavy to be an egg, but Eliza says 'Well, then, it's a heavy egg', and she puts it under her pillow. At bedtime it gets warm next to her face, so she puts it on the bedside table, and in the morning there is a stone bird, with a beak and knowing eyes. Time passes, and in the winter another little stone appears next to the bird. A bird and its egg have to be kept warm until the spring, and she makes them a nest out of her socks. In the spring, there is

indeed another bird, very tiny, and in the warmer weather, with the window open, the birds disappear, until her birthday morning, when they appear on the shed roof. They take flight, but leave her a grey feather.

Patrick Benson's luminous illustrations of this simple story make this a delightful book. Eliza, and the mother who finally appreciates her child's imagination and stops arguing, are well characterised, but the grandparents (this is evidently a single parent family) who come for Christmas are perhaps too conventionally 'old' for a possible 5 or 6 year grandchild – Gran has thick and baggy grey tights, grey hair in a bun and a walking stick. The background details are interesting: there are lots of toys and ornaments around, and an actual recognisable book, My favourite Fairy Tales by Tony Ross lies on Eliza's bedside table. One close-up of Eliza's face filling a whole page as she gazes in wonder at her stone bird on the opposite page is particularly striking.

This is Jenny McCartney's first book, and it is clear that the editorial staff at the excellent Andersen Press have faith in her – she is an author to watch out for. **DB**

What's Next Door?

★★★★★

Nicola O'Byrne, Nosy Crow, 32pp, 978-0-8576-3832-8, £11.99 hbk

What a fantastically engaging book to read out loud. Nicola O'Byrne's book provides die cut portals into different habitats for a hapless croc called Carter who can't find his proper home. The book begins with a question and continues with questions to the reader throughout. Well actually the first question has a little threat with it too – 'Please can you help me find my way home? Or I will eat you.' Children now it's in jest but it still reels them in – it certainly did with my audience of children.

The reader/s then have different actions to perform in order to help Carter get through each door. The physical action contributes to making the book more memorable as it makes it even more interactive.

The book works as a chunky hardback – robust enough for the die cast doors throughout and of course for that crocodile to make it through to the right place. The story itself is excellent for context to learn about habitats. Poor Carter keeps going through doors that take him to the wrong place. The illustrations are very funny; one door leads to a desert where he is pictured looking very uncomfortable, one leads to an arctic setting where it is just too cold for him. Carter's facial expressions are great for discussion – you really do hope he finds the right door just so he is happy after all those wrong doors!

A very interactive, memorable and fun portal adventure to inspire lots more books with holes in once children have the idea. **SG**

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

Brian Alderson is founder of the Children's Books History Society and a former Children's Books Editor for **The Times**.

Gwynneth Bailey is a freelance education and children's book consultant.

Clive Barnes, formerly Principal Children's Librarian, Southampton City is a freelance researcher and writer.

Diane Barnes, was a librarian for 20 years, mostly as a children's specialist, working in Kent, Herts, Portsmouth and Hampshire, and Lusaka (Zambia) with the British Council.

Jill Bennett is the author of **Learning to Read with Picture Books** and heads up a nursery unit.

Jon Biddle is English Coordinator/Reading Champion at Moorlands Primary Academy in Norfolk, and co-founder of the **Patron of Reading** scheme.

Rebecca Butler writes and lectures on children's literature.

Jane Churchill is a children's book consultant.

Stuart Dyer is an Assistant Head Teacher in a Bristol primary school.

Anne Faundez is a freelance education and children's book consultant.

Janet Fisher is a children's literature consultant.

Geoff Fox is former Co-Editor (UK) of **Children's Literature in Education**, but continues to work on the board and as an occasional teller of traditional tales.

Sarah Gallagher is a headteacher and director of **Storyshack.org** www.storyshack.org

Christine Hammill teaches in a college of further education and is also an author

Ferelith Hordon is a former children's librarian and editor of **Books for Keeps**

Matthew Martin is a primary school teacher.

Sue McGonigle is a Lecturer in Primary Education and Co-Creator of www.lovenmybooks.co.uk

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Sue Roe is a children's librarian.

Elizabeth Schlenker is the compiler of www.healthybooks.org.uk

Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

5 – 8 Infant/Junior

The Great Race: the story of the Chinese Zodiac

★★★★

Christopher Corr, Lincoln Children's Books, 32pp, 978-1-7860-3065-8, £11.99 hbk

Christopher Corr tells the story of the Jade Emperor, who, realising that he didn't know how old he was, decided that there was a need to mark the passage of time. He challenged all the animals in the kingdom to a race, in which the first twelve to cross the river would have a year named after them. In vibrant colour, the animals make their attempts, and all sorts of co-operation or sabotage ensue. The cat and the rat used to be great friends and had curled up together, but the rat leaves the cat sleeping, hitches a ride on the ox and jumps off his back to be the first to land on the riverbank, with the ox second. The tiger is weighed down by water in his fur, but manages to be third, and the rabbit, who doesn't like getting his feet wet, is lucky enough to find enough floating objects to get across, so he is fourth, and it turns out that the dragon had blown a log in his direction- dragon is fifth. So it continues, with all the animals featured getting their place, except for the cat, who is furious with the rat for not waking him - rats have fled from cats ever since. The animals are all male, but that is probably how the story was told originally.

The colour is wonderful, bold and glowing, and the style is simple and effective. Christopher Corr specialises in folk art, has researched Chinese painting and ceramics and travelled extensively in Asia, so his illustrations look authentically Chinese: the tiger and the dragon are particularly good, and the Jade Emperor is magnificent. His other books include one of folk tales from around the world with Angela McAllister, and **My Granny Went to Market** by Stella Blackstone, as well as two of Indian legends, for which his style also matches the texts well. This is a book to pore over, and will also be fun to read aloud and share. **DB**

Mrs Noah's Pockets

★★★★

Jackie Morris, ill. James Mayhew, Otter-Barry Books, 32pp, 978 1 91095 909 1, £11.99, hbk

Here's an entirely original rendition of the Noah's Ark story that will surprise and delight, especially those who love a subversive character for we surely have one in Jackie Morris' Mrs Noah.

As her husband is busily constructing an ark and making plans to rid the world of some of the 'more troublesome creatures' thereon, Mrs Noah, aware of his lists of condemned creatures, is not as her husband thinks, stitching curtains for the ark;

rather she's snipping, threading, tacking, tucking and stitching herself a coat of many pockets: pockets in which to hide all those creatures her husband intends to leave behind when they set sail.

And set sail they do, eventually finding a safe landing place where Mr Noah could allow his chosen animals to spill out and Mrs Noah too, could release her animals, those magical stowaways which are the stuff of fantastical tales of their own.

The whole book is superb: its overall design; Jackie Morris' perfectly crafted, at times poetic, prose; and James Mayhew's dramatically eye-catching, new style illustrations both large and small – a mix of collage and print-making. Together they make for what must surely become a classic picture book. **JB**

Salam Alaikum: A Message of Peace

★★★★

Harris J, ill. Ward Jenkins, Simon & Schuster, 32pp, 978 1 4814 8938 6, (no UK price) hbk

Harris J, a young Muslim from London, has become known for his faith-inspired music, and this picture book – all about peace and love and inspiring others to be caring in their relationships – has as its text one of his songs. We have an explanation of both the formal and informal ways of saying Salam Alaikum or 'peace be with you', and both are used in the book. Perfectly matched with exciting pictures that enhance the whole greatly, it is a happy and joyous production that will encourage children to join the chain of people being nice to each other. The story begins on a grey and rainy day in a big city. Surrounded by grey people looking sad and damp is a boy carrying a red umbrella and a tin of paint, the only colourful person in the picture. He sees a woman without an umbrella and gives his to her, and this brings on a wonderful transformation. Clouds begin to lift, and the young woman buys a red balloon for a little girl; she in turn gives the balloon to a poor-looking boy who gives an apple to an old lady. The chain continues until the weather is the brightest of bright, the kind thought each time being accompanied by a big splash of yellow. A kitten is rescued, a car is repaired, and through all the activity we see the original boy with his paint tin collecting the people who have been kind behind him as he goes. The final pictures see everyone, all ages, races and colours, helping to paint a wall and then holding hands in unity and joy. It's a wonderful way of expressing the way humanity should live together. It will make children (and adults) happy and ready to change the world! **ES**

Grandad's Secret Giant

★★★★

David Litchfield, Lincoln Children's Books, 40pp, 978-1847808479, £11.99, hbk

Grandad's Secret Giant is David Litchfield's enchanting follow-up to his prizewinning debut, **The Bear and the Piano**. According to Billy's grandad, there's a giant living secretly in the town who spends his time doing good deeds for the people who live there. So far, he has mended the town clock, stopped trees from falling during storms and rescued dogs trapped on roofs. However, Billy takes a lot of convincing that the giant is real as he can't understand why he would want to keep his existence a secret. His grandad explains that when people see the giant they get scared because he is different. When Billy eventually encounters the giant, he initially runs away but then quickly realises that the giant is feeling lonely and only wants a friend.

This picturebook is an absolute joy from start to finish. The story is simple and accessible with some lovely figurative language (He has hands the size of tables, legs as long as drainpipes and feet as big as rowing boats...). The contrast between the atmospheres created in the opening and closing endpapers would provide a great basis for a discussion. David Litchfield's use of colour throughout the vibrant illustrations is excellent, as is the way that he uses body language to show the different emotions of the main characters. There is so much to see in the pictures that it is a book that requires repeated reading.

The main themes of the story are prejudice and loneliness and it provides a thought-provoking lesson about how we all need to look beyond the obvious before making judgments about people. Although aimed at younger children, older children will also enjoy discussing the messages contained within, as well being swept into the stunning artwork. **JB**

The Grotlyn

★★★★

Benji Davies, Harper Collins, 32pp, 978-0-00-821275-9, £12.99, hbk

In this striking picturebook we travel back in time to a grimy cityscape with oil lamps, night caps and organ grinders. Since hearing an organ tune, young Rubi has had a strange rhyme in her head about a Grotlyn visiting houses at night. Is that what she can hear scuttling across her floor as she lies in bed, or is it just a mouse? Soon others in the town report hearing strange noises too, and objects mysteriously disappearing. Rumours about a Grotlyn in the town are spreading. Readers feeling nervous can be reassured with the words: 'But don't be afraid to sleep – to dream! For things are not quite what

they seem.' And indeed the mystery is eventually solved with a surprise ending; the night time thief turns out to be the organ grinder's monkey collecting what he needs to make a daring escape from his master.

This is a mysterious rhyming picturebook, with just the right balance of spookiness and reassurance, from the talented creator of **The Storm Whale** and **Grandad's Island**. The illustrations are atmospheric, rich and detailed with lots to spot, including wonderful double page spreads before the title page and after the story ends. A perfect story to share on a dark night. **SMc**

The Bad Mood and the Stick

★★★★

Lemony Snicket, ill. Matt Forsythe, Andersen Press, 40pp, 978 1 78344 642 1, £11.99 hbk

Young Curly is two hours into a bad mood and it's all on account of missing out on an ice cream. She chooses to take it out on her little brother Matt by means of a stick she finds on the ground as she walks along with her mum and small sibling. Her mum chastises her, telling her to get rid of the stick which Curly tosses away and with it goes her bad mood. That however is now resting with her mother.

And the stick? That has been found by a racoon, but the creature plus stick manages to alarm old Lou causing him to trip and plop right into a muddy puddle. Curly's mum finds this hilarious and thus her bad mood shifts right on to Lou. He takes himself off to the dry cleaners forthwith where, despite protestations from proprietor Mrs Durham, he strips off to his undies to wait while she deals with his muddy dungarees.

Surprisingly the bad mood misses her thanks to Lou's appearance, and goes off down the road. The stick meanwhile has become the carrier of cheer. On its next appearance it is colourfully adorned with a cocoon that, discovered by one, Bert, has become an exhibit in his ice cream shop window. The very shop window outside which Curly's mum stops, attracted by the window display and then it's a case of ice creams all round. Bert too pops into the ice cream shop, sporting his now clean dungarees, and his purchase leads in time to a surprise wedding with the entire cast of characters – human and animal – in attendance.

And what of the bad mood and the stick? The former has done a trip around the world and the latter has stayed put, though not exactly as it was for we all know what happens when a cocoon opens ...

Snicket's deliciously off beat tale twists and turns in unexpected ways – it's a veritable concatenation of surprises. For Matt Forsythe's retro-style illustrations he uses a colour palette that gives the impression one is peering

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into one of those ice-cream parlour counter displays filled with delectable open containers of ice creams of various alluring hues. And, he's imbued the whole story with a prevailing sense of community that not even the bad mood could dissipate. **JB**

The Last Chip

★★★★

Duncan Beedie, Templar, 32pp, 978-1-7837-0062-2 £6.99 pbk

This book supports **The Trussel Trust**, a foodbank charity.

It champions diversity, and shows how strangers can be life-saving. Percy Pigeon is small and alone, and *hungry*. Whenever he finds a food opportunity he is bullied and denied any share of food. He tries many hopeful sites; the railway station with its rushing commuters, the city rooftops, (St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol?) and he even flies to the park, where he knows people throw food into the pond to feed the birds. (Oh, what gloriously happy and fat ducks they are!) Again, Percy is driven from the pond, the ducks thrashing him with wings and abuse. Flying to the seaside, at last he spots a discarded piece of fish. But his excitement is soon crushed by a huge, peg-leg of a giant seagull, complete with skull and crossbones pirate's hat.... spot the I love MUM tattoo! 'THERE BE NO PICKINGS FOR LAND-LUBBIN' VERMIN LIKE THEE,' roars the seagull. He grabs poor Percy and slam-dunks him into a rubbish bin. Weak with hunger, Percy eventually makes it home, plummeting from the skies to the street below, landing next to a street-dweller. She recognises his acute hunger, and offers Percy her last chip of the title. The author/illustrator has used the illustrations to add much to this story, using flat tones and muted colours. Visual jokes abound; spot the water-skier coming a cropper, the fisherman knitting his net, Mr Drippy the ice-cream man and van. This is a book to make the reader think. Percy never gave up. He found someone who could save him. Someone who needed saving herself. **GB**

The Chinese Emperor's New Clothes

★★★★

Ying Chang Compentine, ill. David Roberts, Abrams Books, 32pp, 978 1 4197 2542 5, £12.99 hbk

In this reworking of Hans Anderson's amusing tale we meet Ming Da; a very different kind of ruler. Becoming emperor at only nine year's old, Ming Da's greedy, selfish ministers decide to take advantage of him and steal from the treasury, meaning he is unable to help the people of his kingdom who are poor and hungry. Ming Da is determined to do something about this and hatches a plan with the court tailors. Dressed in rough sacking painted with ink and vegetable juice, the young emperor

convinces his foolish ministers he is dressed in finest silks and persuades them to have similar clothes made to wear at the New Year's parade. Each of the vain ministers wants to have the most magnificent costume and pays the tailors with gold, jewels and rice to make their outfit the most splendid. At the parade the crowd roar with laughter when they see the Emperor and his ministers wearing old sacks. Realising they have been tricked, the corrupt officials run away and Ming Da now has the money and food to look after his citizens so that they no longer suffer.

This is a well told story with a clever twist on the original tale. The author's note at the back of the book provides an insight into her own experiences growing up during the Cultural Revolution and her inspiration for the story. Roberts' attractive, stylised illustrations evoke the designs of ancient China and add to the humour, the parade scene is particularly stunning. This would be a great story to share at Chinese New Year and the inclusion of instructions for how to make your own New Year parade costume is a nice touch. **SMC**

The Star Tree

★★★★

Catherine Hyde, Lincoln Children's Books, 32pp, 978 1 84780 673 4, £7.99, pbk

This illustrator, renowned for her illustrations of her other picture books, all three nominated for the **Kate Greenaway Medal**, has also written the text of this book, marrying the ethereal words with the mythical pictures, creating a book with a wondrous glow about it. It is midnight at midsummer. Mia is awake, and she tiptoes to her window to look out of the dreaming house to the moonlit garden. Her magical adventure begins as she sits upon her rocking horse, swinging high and low. She wishes on the midsummer moon. As she wishes, the Great White Owl swoops to her window, singing a song, willing her to climb on his back and fly away with him; to sail with the Little Red Hare, (spotted on her windowsill)... away to the north, the snow, looking for the land with a light in a tree. The text murmurs on with such quiet yet demonstrative adjectives creating images beyond those in the illustrations, 'where the blunted weather vane barely stirs.' Their destination is reached, 'as the snow falls and the stars bloom and the sky shines, and Mia plucks one small star from the gleaming tree.' The homeward journey is just as magical, until we join Mia, deeply sleeping in her bed as the house breathes in, and the house breathes out. This is a book which demands reverential turning of each page, and study of each softly chalked illustration, with an immediate return to the beginning having reached the final page. Hyde has truly captured magic. I loved it. **GB**

Where's Your Creativity?

★★★★

Aaron Rosen and Riley Watts, ill. Marika Maijala, Tate Publishing, 32pp, 978-1-8497-6509-1, £11.99 hbk

Do a little dance. Wriggle like a snake. Then drift like a cloud.' There are many ideas in **Where's Your Creativity?** to entice everybody – young and old – to find it. The book is definitely one to dip in and out of especially on a rainy day. Each set of pages has a particular theme around which to get creative e.g. through a physical activity, when you're outside, when you're eating. There's a great hint about being creative when lying around in the sitting room with suggestions about pillows: '...the book beside you is a treasure map, the pillow is an island and your cup is a telescope.'

The words have an easy to read rhythm which gives a fun flow to the book. Marika Maijala's illustrations are very bright, bold and cheery with some effective full colour pages. The drawings are quickly done with a freedom about them-the movement adding to the call to 'get creative.' There are lots of little seeds of ideas in the book to inspire children to start to play and imagine. It's a lovely beginning into imagining, thinking and exploring. **SG**

Everybody Feels....

★★★★

Happy 978 1 78493 858 1

Sad 978 1 78493 856 7

Scared 978 1 78493 857 4

Angry 978 1 78493 855 0

Maura Butterfield, ill. Holly Sterling, QED Publishing, 24pp each, £6.99 pbk

This series of picture books contain both story and information in context, and will prove a real winner, particularly for schools. The books share the same characters, sometimes at the same school and sometimes at home. **Happy** tells us about Ethan who is happy because he is going on holiday and Sophie who makes gifts for her friends, who then reciprocate and everyone is happy. **Sad** gives us Chloe, who is sad because she has lost her favourite toy; Omar is sad because his cat has died. In **Scared**, Omar is frightened of going to his new school and Chloe doesn't want to stand up in front of the class for 'show and tell'. **Angry** shows us Sophie getting very angry because her little brother has drawn on her picture and Ethan angry with his brother who has eaten his chocolate. The stories feel very real, and the emotions come through nicely with lots of integrated text and bright pictures. There is also good resolution for each child. A chapter in the beginning of each book explains what each emotion feels like in quite graphic ways: anger is 'like a kettle about to boil...clenched fists... face screwed up'. There is a table of contents, a glossary with pictures, and a summation of each of the stories which should help with activities in school, and at the very end, there is information for teachers to help plan for such. Altogether a good series for explaining basic emotions to children in ways that will be well understood. **ES**

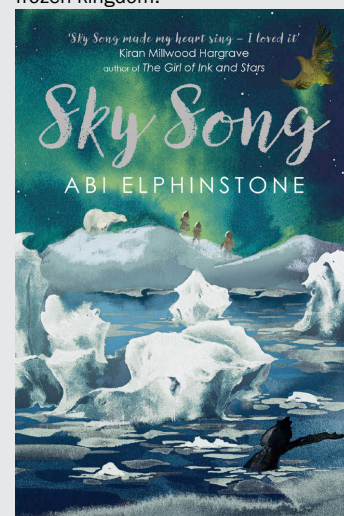
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Sky Song

★★★★

Abi Elphinstone, Simon and Schuster, 288pp, 978-1-4711-4607-7, £6.99 pbk

In the icy lands of Erkenwald, 12-year-old huntress Eska is accidentally freed from her year-long imprisonment in a cursed music box by Flint, a boy with an invention for almost every situation. Alongside Blu, Flint's younger sister, Pebble, an excitable and permanently hungry fox cub and Balapan, a powerful eagle, they must escape from Winterfang Palace and ultimately overcome the evil Ice Queen, who is stealing the voices of her subjects in a desperate quest for immortality. The only way that she can be defeated is by finding the ancient Frost Horn and using it to release the magical Sky Song, which will then unite the three tribes of the frozen kingdom.



This is a fast-paced adventure, full of action and excitement, but it also contains a deeper message about the importance of loyalty and friendship. The world that Abi Elphinstone has created is beautifully drawn and introduces many concepts of ancient mythology. The two lead characters, Eska and Flint, both grow and develop throughout the story; Eska, as she learns that friendship can be an incredibly powerful weapon and Flint, as he gradually realises that he must change many of his long established views about the other tribes of the kingdom. The portrayal of Flint's deep love for his sister Blu, who has learning difficulties, is one of the highlights of the book, as is the depiction of the vast and majestic wilderness in which the story takes place.

For children who have enjoyed the Narnia stories or the Chronicles of

Ancient Darkness by Michelle Paver, this would be an excellent addition to the bookshelf. Although **Sky Song** was written as a stand-alone adventure, the snowy world created is so rich that it provides a wonderful opportunity to imagine the further adventures that might take place. **JBid**

The Travels of Ermine: Trouble in New York

★★★★

Jennifer Gray, illus Elisa Paganelli, Usborne, 978-1-4749-2725-3, 160pp, £5.99pbk

A very determined young lady is coming to stay with the Megabucks in New York. This is going to be fun. However, the young lady turns out to be Ermine, a stoat of character and style. When the little case holding her smart feathered hat is taken by mistake by thieves, her visit becomes action packed. Can Ermine bring the robbers to justice?

Here is a lively new character to enchant young readers who will enjoy Ermine's escapades most of which play upon the misunderstandings that will arise when your main protagonist is animal in a human world. There is plenty to raise a smile – Ermine attempts to make breakfast for Mr Megabucks (chilli sauce features) or Mike Junior's well aimed ice cream cones – and Ermine is both quick and clever, her opponents suitably stupid. Gray's storytelling is brisk and enjoyable, while the illustrations by Elisa Paganelli add life and character enhancing both the action and the humour. Ermine is a welcome addition to the pantheon of feisty animal heroes and heroines. **FH**

The Story of Paintings: A History of Art for Children

★★★★

Mick Manning and Brita Granstrom, Franklin Watts, 88pp, 978-1-4451-5004-8, £14.99 hdbk

The award-winning partnership that is Mick Manning and Brita Grandstrom produces books that are well known and respected in children's non-fiction, and this is another outstanding book. Taking the story of art from cave painting in Lascaux, with a caveman explaining in speech bubbles that the paintings make the cave a scared space, that they paint the animals they hunt for food, and what they use for the pictures, the story begins with a brief introduction to the art of ancient civilisations with the emphasis on gods and heroes in their tombs, then classical civilisations displaying wealth and power in their houses, then early Christian art like icons, before moving on to what the authors admit was the difficult choice of their favourite 39 paintings. Both are illustrators as well as authors, so this must indeed have involved a great deal of discussion. Each work is portrayed in a double-page spread,

with the painting reproduced, then a short piece of information and a cartoon of the artist, with a comment in a speech bubble. Children may especially enjoy the beady-eyed young Giotto, as an apprentice, painting a fly so lifelike on his master Cimabue's canvas that Cimabue tried several times to brush it off! Words like 'lamenting' are explained in a natural way. Some spreads give items to look for, like the dog in the Arnolfini portrait, or particular groupings in L.S. Lowry's 'Fun Fair at Daisy Nook', (which is a bit like a 'Where's Wally' picture.) The artists covered include less well-known artists like Shen Zhou, Mir Kalan Khan and Anders Zorn as well as Leonardo da Vinci (Mona Lisa), Monet and van Gogh. Female artists are definitely included: Dame Laura Knight, Tamara de Lempicka, Frida Kahlo and Georgia O'Keefe are all there, and a rare female artist of the 17th century, Rachel Ruysch, new to this reviewer. Roy Lichtenstein's comic-book style and Jean-Michel Basquiat's work inspired by graffiti bring us almost up to date, and we come full circle with Picasso admiring the Lascaux paintings.

Some children may know the mask of 'The Scream', and here is the picture. They may also have fun thinking about the way Jackson Pollock painted (the authors explain that throwing paint around with style is not as easy as one might think) and may want to copy Arcimboldo and his vegetable paintings that look like faces. There is a comprehensive Glossary as well as a complete index of paintings, artists and terms used. This is a really fun way of finding out about paintings, education without realising it, and a masterly book to treasure. **DB**

Witchfairy

★★★★

Brigitte Minne, ill. Carll Cneut, Book Island, 40pp, 978 1 911496 07 6, £12.99 hbk

The story of this wordless picturebook Meet Rosemary, a young fairy who lives with her traditional mum in a golden-turreted castle. Rosemary however, is not your traditional fairy, she's a divergent young miss who is decidedly disappointed with her birthday present of a 'stupid magic wand' and would have much rather had a pair of roller skates.

This isn't the only disappointment in Rosemary's life though: indeed she is unhappy with her clean-living, deadly dull life as a fairy and would far rather be a witch. Her mum is horrified at the mere thought but Rosemary is a determined child. She ignores the advice of her fellow fairies, packs her bags and flies away. She'll soon be back, thinks her mum, but life in witches' wood suits Rosemary all too well. She fashions for herself a treehouse and a boat and forages for nuts and berries. The other witches

are welcoming and one loans her a pair of roller skates and in return Rosemary teaches the witches the odd mischievous trick or two. Proud of her prowess on a broomstick, Rosemary flies back to show off her new skill to her mother back at the castle but while there she comes to know that she has made her mother very sad by leaving home. Eventually, after a reciprocal visit, a compromise is made: Rosemary the 'witchfairy' is born.

Wonderfully inspiring; hold determinedly on to your dreams is the abiding message that shines through this meticulously illustrated book. It certainly wowed this reviewer and I'm sure Rosemary, the Witchfairy, will find countless other admirers both young and not so young. **JB**

Three Cheers For Women!

★★★★

Marcia Williams, Walker, 48pp, 978 1 4063 7486 5, £12.99 hbk

Starting with Cleopatra and ending with Malala Yousafzai, Marcia Williams takes a chronological sprint through the lives of over 70 inspirational women with their stories and achievements depicted in her characteristic comic-strip style. This volume of brief biographies, full of facts, dates, quotes and jokes, provides a lively addition to the recent spate of children's book titles celebrating women's roles throughout history.

Each double-page spread features a different woman and is cleverly designed to include as much information as possible in small blocks of text whilst the detailed, humorous comic-strip illustrations draw the eye and hold the attention, crammed as they are with action, background detail and light-hearted speech bubbles. Each central frame is surrounded by snippets of fascinating fact and the recurring characters of a boy, a girl, a mouse and some birds with their own speech bubbles provides extra commentary and unites the whole work. This style and format ensures accessibility to a wide range of child readers and although each life story is necessarily dealt with fairly briefly there is enough information and detail to spark interest and encourage further investigation.

The range of lives covered is wide and diverse, from many cultures and countries, and for all the familiar figures, Florence Nightingale, Marie Curie, Anne Frank, Joan of Arc, to name a few, there are also less well known lives to discover, from Wangari Maathai, Kenyan environmentalist, to Mae C. Jemison, the first African-American woman in space.

In the final pages Marcia Williams squeezes in more paragraphs of information and lists of names so giving the reader an idea of the difficulty of choosing only 70 amazing women. This is a timely, welcome book that will remind child readers that gender, age, background, culture and country need not be barriers to world changing achievements. **SR**

I'm Just No Good at Rhyming and Other Nonsense Verse for Mischievous Kids and Immature Grown Ups

★★★★

Chris Harris, ill. Lane Smith, Two Hoots, 220pp, 978-1-5098-8104-8, £14.99 hbk

This is a wonderful playful collection of poetry with appeal for children and grown-ups. As the title suggests there is word play and nonsense, with islands where everyone is called Toby, a strange beast called a one eyed orr, a baby dragon who wants his knight on toast without the crust (armour) and what happens when a centipede tries to get his shoes on the right feet. There is plenty of humour with jokes and riddles (some deliberately very unfair) and puzzles, including a poem to read backwards and a duel between the letters d and b. The title belies the range within however, there is so much more than nonsense here. This is also a collection which is full of love and hope, warmly perceptive about being a child and growing up and being a parent observing this happening.

There are poems that speak about familiar themes such as how annoying it can be to share a biscuit with a sibling and poems about the struggles of being a parent, such as *The Sweetest Lullaby* about the getting a child to sleep. There is commentary and wisdom from the writer on the ups and downs of life and how these help to shape you in *The Little Hurts* and *The Valleys Shape the Mountains. You'll never Feel as Tall as When you're Ten* speaks poignantly of childhood confidence and how easily this can be lost. There is recognition that no matter what excitement the world offers, the most special thing of all is a cuddle between parent and child. The book itself speaks to the reader in *Let's Meet Here in 25 Years* – a wonderful poem about memories of childhood, growing up and confidence in the adult the young reader will one day become.

There are poems of all shapes and sizes, poems for readers to finish and dialogues which invite sharing and performing. Some poems are linked or reprised at different points in the book. There are puzzles to spot and solve, including a mysterious page numbering system.

There are many wonderful illustrations from award winning illustrator Lane Smith. Ongoing banter between writer and illustrator add to the humour. The book design is excellent too, from the hard cover under the fly leaf which has different images including a character asking where his jacket has gone. This is a gem of a debut collection from American writer Chris Harris and in case you are wondering, contrary to the book's title, he is very good at rhyming! **SMC**

Sky Chasers

★★★★

Emma Carroll, Chicken House, 278pp, 978 1 910655 53 5, £6.99, pbk
This adventure story has an historical setting, in France, in the

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age of mansions and aristocrats and servants and horses-and-carts. It is set in a time before the age of flight, when the notion of soaring above the clouds was barely conceivable. A few wealthy adventurers are experimenting with hot air, cotton and paper (with sometimes terrifying results!) and are desperate to defeat English competitors in the race to the skies.

Into this scene, tumbles (rather unwittingly) a young, impoverished thief called Magpie. She is a worthy hero for any adventure story: fearless, fun, funny and accompanied throughout by an extremely sleepy rooster. Magpie enters the household of the aeronautical family, the Montgolfiers, under commission to steal secrets. Rather than the quick employment opportunity she predicts, it becomes an introduction to adventure.

Magpie meets the young Pierre Montgolfier, and his pet duck, and the young pair soon realise that Pierre's father will not be able to succeed in his quest for flight without their help. The pair have an enjoyable chemistry and spur each other on to find solutions that will help get their inventions into the air; not even Madame Montgolfier's undergarments are safe from scientific experiments!

Magpie faces a dilemma, as her life as a thief struggles to give way to her desire to be part of history. It is her friendship with the plucky Pierre and the trust she receives from him, that helps her make the right choices. Their plans draw the attention of spies and thieves and even the French king, and their journey, which began in a field clinging desperately to ropes, eventually takes the friends all the way to the royal palace at Versailles.

Pierre and Magpie's journey is described with a pace and energy that will ignite young imaginations, but the tale also includes many interesting references to the history of flight, as well as intriguing twists and surprises that are well-concealed. Some of the characters, particularly the villains, are somewhat underdeveloped, resulting in a lack of tension or suspense in places, but a feeling of awe and wonder is maintained throughout, and readers will share the balloonists' sensation of being swept along into the unknown. **SD**

I Swapped My Brother on the Internet

★★★★

Jo Simmons, ill. Nathan Reed, Bloomsbury, 291pp, 978 1 4088 7775 3, \$5.99 pbk

In this humorous book, Jo Simmons explores a question that many children will have asked themselves at one time or another: what if I could swap my brother or sister for a better one?

Using an exciting new website – Sibling Swap – Jonny is granted the power to do just that. His older brother, Ted, is, naturally, extremely annoying.

He puts salt in Jonny's drinks, burps in his ear and teases him incessantly about his inability to climb trees. It's a blessed relief for Jonny to rid himself of his tormentor but he soon finds that the grass is not always greener on the other side of the Internet.

Jonny is sent a parade of replacement siblings. Each seems perfect to begin with, but invariably they have something about them that Jonny just can't live with. Jonny fails to stipulate that he'd like a human, or even a living sibling, and, as a result, each replacement is more bizarre than the last. Readers are required to suspend their disbelief beyond the merely implausible, to the totally ridiculous, when mermen, ghosts of Tudor monarchs and even human meerkats knock on Jonny's door. Though the resulting comedy is somewhat hit-and-miss, there is also drama and tension to be enjoyed, as Jonny begins to wonder what might have happened to his real brother, Ted.

Jonny's misadventures with his new siblings lead him to question his choice to swap Ted and he begins remembering all of the things he enjoyed about spending time with his brother. As a result, an endearing feeling of love and positivity is grown, which is welcome accompaniment to an extremely silly tone overall.

Children will laugh at Jonny's colourful language ('Oh sweet mangoes of heaven!') and will find the Hanging Pants of Doom hilarious. Though readers will enjoy dreaming of similar sibling swaps for their own pesky brothers and sisters, the concept and the comedy are stretched a little thin by the end. **SD**

The Polar Bear Explorers' Club

★★★★

Alex Bell, ill. Tomislav Tomic, Faber & Faber, 315pp, 978 0 571 33254 0, \$6.99, pbk

Portraits of the most famous and esteemed members of the Polar Bear Explorers' Club adorn its entrance hall; 'They were all men, of course, and they all seemed to have a penchant for monocles and morose moustaches'. Nothing could be more British – indeed, English – including Alex Bell's good-natured mockery of male self-importance in what feels like a late Victorian or Edwardian setting. In fact, we're never limited to any real-world locations or dates, which allows Bell's characters to embark upon perilous adventures in a Frozen North where anything goes – carnivorous cabbages, untrustworthy trolls, ice palaces, yetis, mammoths and unicorns and whatever else Bell thinks might tickle the fancy of young readers. Tomislav Tomic's enhance the plot's icy dangers, offering many intriguing details to explore.

The book begins with twelve pages of Rules of each of the world's four great Explorers' Clubs. An adult reader

might find the humour of this prelude to the novel repetitious, but this would be to ignore the enjoyment readers of this age group find in re-worked jokes as they grow accustomed to a writer's tongue-in-cheek verbal games. There is intense rivalry between the Desert Jackal, the Jungle Cat, the Ocean Squid and Polar Bear Explorers' Clubs, reminiscent of that between Houses in early 20th Century public school stories. All the Clubs are run by elderly chaps untroubled by doubts about their innate superiority and status. One of the very occasional exceptions is Felix, a fairyologist by profession and the adoptive father of our heroine, Stella Starflake Pearl, whom we meet on the eve of her twelfth birthday. Felix found her, just a couple of years old, abandoned in the snowy wastes of the Icelands on one of his expeditions. He has made a home for her which delights them both. Stella has no conscious memories of life before Felix, though she's visited by recurring dreams worthy of one of the Grimms' most unsettling tales.

Stella longs to go on an expedition herself and, but for the rules of the Polar Bear Explorers' Club, Felix would gladly take her. To no reader's surprise, they get around this little difficulty, and soon she finds herself sailing North aboard The Bold Adventurer, joining three boys who have little in common with her or each other. There's Beanie, who is part elf, which may account for his powers of healing along with his dislike of 'small talk, sarcasm, handshakes, hugs and haircuts'; Shay, who's a decent fellow, a reliable leader with an inborn talent for handling the wolves one needs to pull a sled in the Icelands; and Ethan, a magician and also an Ocean Squid Explorer with a loathing of all things Polar Bear, whose initial prickliness stems from a troubled family history which unfolds along with the adventure.

In the time-honoured tradition of R.M. Ballantyne's *Coral Island*, Arthur Ransome, C.S. Lewis et al, the young people are swiftly separated from the adults and must rely upon their own resources. Through their knife-edge adventures they learn loyalty and friendship, revealing their vulnerabilities along the way. Encounters with duplicitous frosty fairies with a taste for human fingers and outlaws holed-up in the ramshackle 'Yak and Yeti' drinking saloon in the middle of a frozen wilderness prepare them to some degree for their final test. Now Stella must confront temptations linked to her own origins; she is invited to wield powers over others which are both cruel and absolute.

The loyalty and friendship between the children brings them back to safety and re-unites them with 'the waxed moustaches and fussy beards and puffy sideburns' of the still-squabbling grown-ups. Finally home, Stella snuggles down in bed with Gruff, her pet polar bear and Buster, the pygmy dinosaur, for comfort and company. But deep inside a suitcase she's brought

back from the Icelands, Something Nasty stirs, surely promising further desperate adventures. **GF**

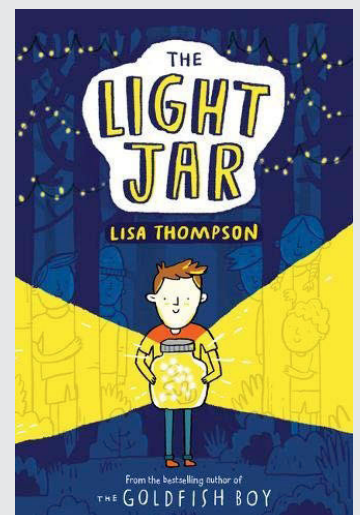
The Light Jar

★★★★

Lisa Thompson, Scholastic, 240pp, 978-1407171289, \$6.99, pbk

Lisa Thompson's poignant and touching new novel tells stories within stories to gradually reveal its truths both to the reader and its central character, eleven-year old Nate.

The opening paragraphs take us through a tunnel to emerge into what could almost be a fairy tale world: Nate and his mum have driven away from their home in the middle of the night to take refuge in a tumbledown cottage that they visited once years ago on holiday. Nate is not sure why his mother has taken them away like this, but from very early we're aware of her new partner Gary as a threatening, dangerous presence in the background. The next day Nate's mum drives out into the snow to buy food leaving Nate to tend the fire, and she doesn't return. In the days that follow two children keep Nate company, one is his old imaginary friend, Sam, the other a girl called Kitty who comes from the big house on the estate, and doesn't seem to be quite of the real world either. It's through his conversations with the two of them that the reader learns about the misery of Nate's home life with Gary, a manipulative bully who has, quite literally, taken the light out of the family's life. Helping Kitty to untangle the clues to an old treasure hunt enables Nate to get back his sense of self-worth, and then to find his mum too.



There are echoes of classic children's stories in the snowy setting of woods and estate garden and also in Nate's ghostly/other-worldly companions and both cleverly temper the bleakness of the domestic abuse storyline, though we are left in no doubt as to the horrible impact of Gary's coercive behaviour.

Thompson's ambitious, original and thoroughly absorbing book tells a big story with a light touch. **AR**

New Talent

The Eye of the North

★★★★

Sinéad O'Hart, Stripes, 978-1-8741-5941-0, 251pp, £6.99pbk

It is always a pleasure to meet characters who immediately demand attention. Enter Emmeline Widget, daughter of scientist parents who are almost always absent. Then there is Thing, a boy with no other name and a mysterious past. Emmeline is convinced her parents are trying to poison her and has spent her life preparing for every eventuality. When a letter arrives with the news that her parents are dead, Emmeline must leave Widget Manor for the first time. It is the start of an adventure in which Emmeline and Thing must save the world.

The action is non-stop and relentless as our two protagonists face not just one villain but a number of characters all with the same goal; immortality and control of the Kraken. However, the author handles her narrative with dexterity carrying the reader with her, juggling between each character so the different storylines work in parallel before meeting. The story is incident packed, perhaps too



packed, but it makes for a rich and truly immersive experience with a satisfying conclusion. There is a wide cast to enjoy in cameo – Madame Blanchefleur, Igimaq and the wonderful Meadowmane, an Aesirsmount, a horse of the gods. This is not a novel to demand deep thought; this is a wild, imaginative adventure to carry one away in the company of characters one would like to meet again. Here is a new young author to watch. **FH**

The Ice Garden

★★★★

Guy Jones, Chicken House Books, 978-1-9114-9004-3, 224pp, £6.99 pbk
What would your life be like if you were unable to go out in the sun at all? This is what Jess has faced all her life; she is allergic to sunlight. When she goes out she has to be completely covered up including a hood that hides her face and goggles. She longs to be normal, to have a friend, for her mum to be less controlling and anxious. So when she squeezes through a gap in the park and finds herself in a world of ice and no sun she feels she has found her very own heaven – but has she?

This is Guy Jones' debut novel, and it shows great promise. While the elements may be familiar, Jones handles his materials confidently and with an attractive freshness. The reader is intrigued by the world he creates for Jess and by the character of Owen, the ice boy who becomes her friend. Nor are these elements random. The life that Jess lives combined with her vivid storytelling imagination provides a link between the two realities, while the connection with Davey, a victim of an accident and in a coma, is another link that clear-eyed young readers will make if they want to. The narrative moves briskly with plenty of dialogue to hold the attention. The drama of

the ice garden, both in its beauty and in its destruction, is gripping; the reader feels the chill – but also the excitement. Jess is an attractive protagonist who will easily make the friends she so longs for in the readers who join her story. 'Magic – friendship – adventure' proclaims the cover. It is right – this is a story you want to read to the final word. **FH**

Norse Myths Tales of Odin, Thor and Loki

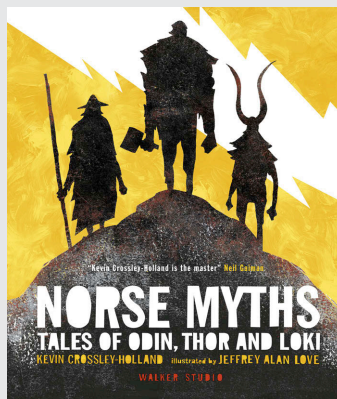
★★★★

Kevin Crossley Holland, ill. Jeffrey Alan Love, Walker Studio, 240pp, 978-1406361841, £18.99, hbk

'When I think about the Vikings,' Kevin Crossley-Holland tells us in the introduction to this magnificent book, 'my eyes brighten, my heart beats faster, and my hair stands on end.' His new retellings of Norse myths will have exactly the same effect on readers. Bold yet flawed, all-powerful and doomed, the gods of the Vikings seem closer to us now than they've ever been and this collection takes us to the heart of their world.

Crossley-Holland tops and tails the collection with two stories about King Gylfi of Sweden. Tricked by a goddess to whom he has been generous, the king disguises himself as a footsore traveller and journeys to Valhalla to find out all that he can about the gods. His questions are answered by three wise kings so readers too learn

about the gods, as well as their co-stars in the stories, the giants and the dwarfs, and Loki, the trickster who lives with the gods and who used to make them laugh. Jeffrey Alan Love's dramatic and beautiful silhouette figures punctuate the tellings and he provides an inky atlas of the linked worlds of Asgard, Midgard, Jotunheim and Niflheim together with an illustrated guide to the characters in the opening pages. Even those coming completely new to the myths therefore will quickly be familiar with the major players.



Eighteen stories follow, and what stories they are: tales of trickery, battle, betrayals and transformations. Each has its own moral or lesson to be learned. The scale of the stories is huge (and Love's monumental illustrations suit them perfectly), but Crossley-Holland is a masterly storyteller, and readers will feel that he is speaking to them and them alone. Amongst the drama and violence, there's space for quiet moments, for individual voices, for humour, for surprising glimpses of the natural beauty of the Norse landscapes.

And throughout there is a sense of progression, of the stories building to the final chapter. It's called *The Last Battle*, and Gylfi, by then at the end of his own life, travels once again to Valhalla for the answer to his question, 'Must whatever begins also end?' Hair-raising stuff indeed.

The Norse myths are some of the best stories ever told and this is a book to inspire and thrill all readers. **AR**

The Prisoner of Ice and Snow

★★★★

Ruth Lauren, Bloomsbury, 278pp, 9781408872758, £6.99

When Sasha is imprisoned for the theft of a national treasure it not only threatens the future of the nation but it also ruins her parents and her twin sister Valor. Fortunately her sister thinks that she is innocent and vows to free Sasha and solve the mystery. In order to do this Valor stages an attempt on the life of the young Prince Anatol and gets herself sentenced

to the same prison as her sister. Of course the underlying question is whether Sasha truly is innocent and if so, then who has set her up and why?

This is a great adventure story full of intrigue and hidden villains. It is also a story about family and the strong bonds between siblings (although not all as you will find out). The author has created a worthy heroine in Valor, someone who is willing to stand up for her beliefs and has the courage to follow her convictions. The story is set in a world that is more than reminiscent of Russia and the characters' names re-inforce this feeling. It is also a world in which the rulers are hereditary queens and men have a more advisory role, which brings a slight twist to the plot; importantly we know that the state is facing danger from elsewhere and needs to be creating alliances in order to keep its independence. These are the sort of themes that we still find today, so that there is a real link to our world and the issues that young people see being discussed around them. As with any good story this author allows you to take different things from the book; it can be read as a brilliant thriller but it also has deeper messages as well. I am delighted that it has a sequel due soon and I look forward to joining Valor and her friends as they continue their adventures. **MP**

Outwalkers

★★★★

Fiona Shaw, David Fickling Books, 422pp, 9781788450003, £10.99

Dystopia scenarios come in many fictional forms, but seldom as regionally based as here. In this tense story, a future England has been taken over by a wicked political cabal while over the border in Scotland ordinary decency still prevails. Brave orphan Jake, whose parents have been murdered because they knew too much, manages to break out from the sadistic boarding establishment which has become his new home. He then links up with a gang of strongly self-supportive children intent on making it to the far North. Fiona Shaw describes their subsequent journey with relish, repeatedly making the point that face-recognition technology among other developments now makes it much easier for dictatorships to keep a tab on all and anyone. So the final escape by a gang of children plus dog, living rough and without friends, is little short of miraculous.

Shaw writes well, and there are some memorable passages, not least when the children try living underground in London for a while. There they explore disused tube stations while keeping a look out for other potentially dangerous occupants. But the author never quite explains why everything has

reviews

10 – 14 Middle/Secondary continued

gone so wrong. Why are the new state orphanages so very punitive, given that most of the other adults in this story still seem sane enough, apart from the dreaded 'Hubbers' manning the ever-present spying systems? And having the children finally bring down a tyrannous government in addition to making it over the border is surely taking several steps too far. Yet if the final version is both too long and too unlikely, there are still some excellent moments from a writer worth keeping a respectful eye on in the future. **NT**

Tortot, The Cold Fish Who Lost His World And Found His Heart

★★★★

Benny Lindelauf, ill. Ludwig Volbeda, translated by Laura Watkinson, Pushkin, 237pp, 9781782691549, £12.99 hbk

This powerful fable about the madness and absurdities of war is written by a multi award-winning Dutch children's book author. It tells the tale of Tortot, a field chef cooking wonderful food for whichever army is currently winning the interminable Great Wars between unspecified European empires. Tortot prides himself on being detached and unemotional and on always being able to switch sides at just the right moment. But one day Tortot finds a surprise hidden in a barrel of gherkins, a boy soldier who has lost his brothers and his legs in battle. Tortot nicknames the boy Half-George and, gradually, his cold heart begins to thaw as affection grows and memories of his own childhood return, leading him to use his wit and culinary skill to bring the never-ending war to a close.

This is an unusual book, difficult to categorise and place in any particular age range. It is at once grim and moving, blackly humorous and harshly violent, a timeless fable and a sharp skewering of the absurdity and vanity of power struggles. It should appeal to thoughtful readers from older juniors, through teens to adults. It will particularly appeal to those readers who love to pore over minutely detailed illustrations as the production of the book is stunning, from its distinctive oblong shape to the complex, intricate illustrations and diagrams that surround and expand the text. The sheer achievement of Dutch illustrator Ludwig Volbeda, here illustrating his first children's book, is remarkable and the combination of witty, bleak, fantastical and meandering text with world-creating illustrations should fascinate readers and compel thought and attention. **SR**

Defenders: Pitch Invasion

★★★★

Tom Palmer, ill. David Shephard, Barrington Stoke, 105pp, 978-1-7811-2731-5, £6.99 pbk

Seth is a young lad who has special sight-he can see into the past. He has a friend who is fascinated by history

and helps him place what he sees into a context. This is the basis of the **Defenders** series of which **Pitch Invasion** is the third. The series is part of the **Conkers** list for Barrington Stoke which offers a good story with high quality fiction to support older children who struggle with reading.

The book is a mystery story with added human interest about relationships and also contains a timely message about tolerance and humanity in general.

Seth's Mum is waiting for the results of recent tests to find out whether she finally has the all clear from cancer. Instead of waiting at home she takes Seth to a village in Cornwall where she used to spend her childhood holidays. The relationship between her and Seth is written in a very touching way. Seth's Mum knows he has this special sight as his Dad also had it before he passed away, so he is able to share what he sees with his Mum and also his friend. He sees a very gory sight on an old fort site-a severed head on a stake. He consults with his friend and she explains this would have been a defence against intruders in an iron aged fort.

He also befriends two Syrian refugee boys when in Cornwall and their story and the Iron Age village story are intertwined cleverly throughout the book. Seth needs to bring these two parts together in order to gain peace for everybody.

The story is indeed a good, pacy read with illustrations to help it along and support understanding. It's perfect for an older reader who really needs a decent gripping story but might be overwhelmed by too chunky a text. I'd be happy to go backwards in time and read the other two now -Seth is a likeable character and I think readers will be able to empathise very well with him and others in the story. **SG**

Dog

★★★★

Andy Mulligan, Pushkin, 245pp, 9781782691716, £10.99 hbk

This edgy, unsettling story features talking animals and their various relationships with the human world. Even fleas and moths are granted adult understanding and voices, yet at other moments they behave like the animals and insects they are. This paradox sometimes jars, as when Spider, the supremely intelligent and articulate dog of the title, suddenly and inexplicably decides to wreck his young master's room, thereby putting everyone in grave danger. But Mulligan is a good writer and always manages to convince. He treats his motley cast of characters with a cool detachment reminiscent of a Russell Hoban or Richard Jefferies, spinning his fictional web with all the skills of Thread, a malicious spider who is another main character.

Human-animal stories often tend to end happily on a note of mutual

congratulation, species to species. This story ends cheerfully too after some last moment melodramatics it could have done without. But it remains a troubling tale. Descriptions of general misery accompany moments of terrible danger arising from bullying, misunderstandings and a capacity on both sides, human and animal, to do the wrong thing without wishing to. There are also questions that are not always answered. Is it fair to blame the spider for capturing and 'torturing' a moth? Are there really industrial plants that melt down stray animals into pet food? If Tom, the eleven-year-old hero of the story, won't talk to his estranged mother when she phones every day for six months, how about a home visit? But never mind; this is still good, original writing that in every other way remains grippingly readable right through to the end. **NT**

Mike

★★★★

Andrew Norriss, David Fickling Books, 264pp, 9781788450096, £10.99 hbk

This novel tells the story of 15 year-old Floyd Beresford, a major tennis star in the making who suddenly decides to quit the game for good. Coached by his enthusiastic but basically caring father, always referred to in the text as Mr Beresford, Floyd is compelled to make this move by the increasing appearances of Mike, a figure around the same age who can only be seen by him. Once Mike actually stops him serving during an important match, it is time to call in the psychologist. Enter Dr Pinner, a figure much given

to consuming tea and cake during his consultations. He and Floyd work out that Mike is in fact a projection of Floyd's hidden dissatisfaction with tennis as an all-consuming future career, a state of mind he has up to that point kept secret both from his parents and himself.

Told in curiously flattened prose, this could read like an unusually interesting case history, with Floyd very much a patient rather than a rounded individual. We hear almost nothing about his time at school, and his feelings for his peer group and the opposite sex also hardly come into it until he meets Charity, a charming American girl of the same age. But now things are getting more complicated, with psychology straying into parapsychology. Because Charity can see Mike too, and this normally taciturn but occasional conversational Spirit also starts helping Floyd make decisions based on what has yet to happen while also revealing an inexplicable mastery of Ancient Greek. All works out well at the end, and the basic plot remains intriguing even while Floyd, his parents, Charity and a few other bit parts remain two-dimensional figures. Reminiscent in its measured prose and general tamping down of emotions of a benign ghost story written a hundred years ago, there is still much to enjoy though potentially troubling possibilities never get raised. Would other characters really accept the presence of Mike so readily even if he remains invisible to them? And what if Mike sometimes gave Floyd bad advice? Part psychological study, part ghost story, this readable but enigmatic story hovers between the two without ever quite deciding which genre finally to plump for. **NT**

14+ Secondary/Adult

Star by Star

★★★★★

Sheena Wilkinson, Little Island, 987-1-9104-1153-7, £6.99 pbk

Set in 1918 at the end of the WW1 this is the riveting tale of a young woman fighting for what she believes in with determination and passion. Stella has been brought by up her single mother, a suffragette who has recently died from the 'flu pandemic raging through the country. Her aunt whom she has never met takes her in and the story opens with Stella's journey to the boarding house her aunt runs in a coastal town not far from Belfast. Cliffside House is a far cry from central Manchester where Stella grew up and her modern ways and outspoken views are a bit of shock to the few inhabitants of the boarding house. But Stella, keen to help soon proves to be invaluable clearing the garden and helping with the housework and even coaxing the young soldier Sandy who is recovering from his trauma at The Front out of his room.



Stella also tracks down her mother's best friend Rose who had become estranged from her mother and she finds out a lot more about

her mother when she was younger and begins to understand more about the suffrage movement, Irish politics and what her mother stood for. She starts to help Rose and her husband Charlie on the farm and discovers an intriguing secret.

Although she is too young to vote Stella is excited by the prospect that for first time women over 30 who are householders or married to a householder will be able to vote and promises to take Rose and Charlie to the polling booth in her aunt's car. But her aunt falls ill with 'flu and at the last minute

Sandy steps in to drive the car braving the town for the first time since he had arrived at Cliffside House.

This is a well-constructed, taut novel and you are drawn in immediately. Stella is an engaging character and despite everything she has gone through eager (some might say over-eager) to organise people and sort out their problems. She is by turns irritating, awkward and headstrong yet has a heart of gold. The tender and burgeoning friendship she has with Sandy is beautifully wrought and although some issues are only glanced over you get a very real sense of not only the political struggles but the horror of the Spanish 'flu at that time. Although Stella sometimes gets carried away by her idealism the message underpinning the novel that individuals can do something to bring about change is powerful and life-affirming. A heart-warming gem of a book. **JC**

The Fandom

★★★★

Anna Day (& Angela McCann), Chicken House, 406pp, 9781910655672, £7.99

When Violet and her friends have a day out at Comic Con in London they imagine that they will just be meeting up with other fans and cos-players of "Gallows Dance", their favourite book and film. What they did not envisage was finding themselves drawn into a parallel world; the world of "Gallows Dance". They definitely did not think they would find themselves in a nightmare where they accidentally kill the fictional heroine and Violet has to take over the role in order to save the story and get them all back to the real world. What follows is a roller coaster ride that subverts the story that they know and places strains on the relations between this group of friends.

I must admit that when I first saw this book it was a case of 'not another dystopian novel', however this has exceeded my expectations and in the end it was a really enjoyable read with lots to make you think. The central characters are well thought out and because of the changes in the expected plot line they have to develop and think beyond the known

'canon'. It is fascinating watching characters grow and see them beginning to understand that this world they have entered is not just a version of the film they have watched; the protagonists that they think they know have in fact undergone their own subtle changes and this makes it impossible to keep rigidly to the original storyline. In many respects this is a form of morality play in which people gradually realize that real life can lead to long term consequences and that we should never mistake fiction for reality. Due to a couple of the scenes that have a slight sexual theme this has been marked as a 14+ (by the publisher as well) and school librarians might want to read the book before they decide on access. Having said all this it was an excellent read and I would definitely recommend it for the suggested age range. **MP**

Goodbye, Perfect

★★★★

Sara Barnard, Macmillan, 308pp, 978 1 5098 5286 4, £6.99, pbk

This is a stunning novel, a must-read not only for young adults, but for adult readers too. Eden and her sister Daisy have had troubled lives. They have been fostered so many times that Eden has built solid defences against what she perceives-often rightly-as a hostile world. When her unkempt appearance and sullen withdrawal invited yet more bullying at the most recent of her schools it was Bonnie, A* student with a perfect record, who rescued Eden and became the best friend she had always wanted.

Eden could not understand Bonnie's interest in her - she was wild, angry, underachieving as a result of the combination of her attitude and her dyslexia. What she failed to realise until much later was that Bonnie - obedient, compliant, exam-obsessed - saw Eden as her foil, the person she would have liked to have been had she felt able to break out of the persona she had been moulded into by her parents and teachers. The crisis comes for Bonnie when she decides to run away with the boyfriend she will only call Jack - her music teacher, Mr Cohn.

Eden feels a double betrayal. She and Bonnie have always shared their deepest secrets but she had never confided this darkest one to Eden. Additionally, Eden had taken a titanic step in forming such a close friendship with Bonnie when her go-to survival strategy involved locking herself away from intimate human contact. Now adopted, she regards her parents, Carolyn and Bob as allies but that group is a very small one and Bonnie was right at the heart of it.

Bonnie's abrupt departure with her teacher, is, of course, treated as abduction of a minor and Barnard beautifully and subtly details the tensions between Bonnie's conviction that this is the adventure she always

wanted with the man she loves and the criminality of Mr Cohn's actions. As Bonnie strives to live the life of abandon which she sees as an escape route from the claustrophobia of study, exams and parental expectations, Eden tries to save her from herself. Extracting clues from the texts and calls she receives from Bonnie, she persuades her boyfriend Connor and her older adoptive sister Valerie to go with her to Glasgow to track Bonnie down.

Barnard excels at the shift and drift of relationships, always avoiding sentimentality and cliché and resisting the tightly bound up climax. Both Eden and Bonnie appear to change markedly during the course of this book-but is that change really just a gradual admittance and acceptance of the flip side of their personalities, long locked away until a crisis thrusts them out into the cold light of reality? **VR**

The Last Days of Archie Maxwell

★★★★

Annabel Pitcher, Barrington Stoke, 104pp, 978-1-7811-2728-5, £7.99 pbk

Archie is a teenage boy. The story opens as Archie has discovered that despite having apparently enjoyed a happy marriage to Archie's mother, his adored father has come out as gay. Thereafter the question is whether Archie will come to terms with this fact or will prove incapable of doing so. There is also a subplot. Tia, a girl that Archie likes, had a brother Tatham who died by suicide on the railway track behind Archie's house. A second question is whether Archie can help Tia find peace from her grief.

This book is a searing and no holds barred exploration of Archie's descent into deep depression and suicidal thoughts. The text is marked by extreme homophobic prejudice and profane language in which the boys communicate one with another. The language gives the impression of veracity.

Pitcher's book is brave and honest, dealing with a topic more cautious authors shrink from. This reviewer found only one reason - though an extremely important reason - to give this book less than a five star rating. Archie has an older sister Maisie. She refers to something she dislikes as 'retarded'. This word is as problematic as the homophobic language employed by the boys. Yet the narrative poses an unfavourable verdict on the characters who use the homophobic language. Maisie uses her unacceptable language without rebuke. **RB**

Shell

★★★

Paula Rawsthorne, Scholastic, 416pp, 978-1-4071-8025-0, £7.99pbk

Lucy Burgess is a teenager in the end-stage of terminal cancer. Her parents are fabulously wealthy and her mother decides she cannot let her die so

a bizarre procedure is performed - without Lucy's knowledge or agreement-in which her brain and eyes are removed and grafted onto a donor body. Family and friends are told that Lucy has died-there is even a funeral - and Lucy takes on her new existence as Renee, a family friend who has been taken in by Lucy's parents.

This surreal and unsettling beginning then gives way to an examination of the moral, ethical and practical implications of such a clandestine procedure. Lucy insists on returning to her old school but cannot get her former best friend Makayla to view her with anything other than hostility and suspicion. Instead, her 'new' athletic, attractive body brings her to the attention of the cheerleading squad, who she always despised for what she saw as their shallowness. Now she enjoys the attention-and the looks and comments from the boys in her year.

However, it is impossible to reconnect with her beloved grandmother, or Arthur, her dog-or her horses. All three sense that 'Renee' is in some way not what she seems to be and withdraw from her. But she is not the only fraudulent element in this equation. Her consultant, Dr Radnor, who Lucy trusts initially, also has another horrifying identity. He runs a clinic in which he claims he is trying to cure young, terminally ill people but he is really abducting and murdering to order, so that those who have enough money to pay-young or old-can literally have a new lease of life. As Lucy/Renee becomes increasingly unhappy the tremors which she noticed in her hands have now spread to the rest of her body and need new, powerful medication.

The plot climbs steadily to new heights of hysteria as Lucy's mother discovers the source of Lucy's distress but blocks out the possibility that the doctor she regarded as a saviour, is, in fact a murderer. Instead of phoning the police she locks Lucy up in the house and summons Dr Radnor so that he can administer the medication which will stop the life-threatening tremors. Meanwhile, a chance encounter with the brother of the murdered girl whose body Lucy now inhabits by means of a party prank captured on youtube inadvertently forms an alliance between the boy and Makayla, who witness the cornered Dr Radnor shooting Lucy's father dead and calamitously wounding her mother.

Reader credibility is stretched to breaking point by this time and what could have been a pacy thriller concerned with identity and the value placed on human life becomes a rather overheated story which piles on one too many pieces of action. **VT**

14+Secondary/Adult continued

Far From The Tree

★★★★

Robin Benway, Simon and Schuster, 374pp, 978-1-4711-6433-0, £7.99 pbk

Grace is 16 years old, pregnant and adopted. Her adoptive parents advise her to give up her baby and she is happy that the couple who are taking her will give her a good life. However, she holds her baby briefly after the birth and then is unable to alleviate the pain of giving her away. She makes the decision to find her biological mother in an attempt to be 'tethered again.' The search yields a surprising discovery—a brother and sister, Joaquin and Maya—of whose existence she was unaware.

Both have their own troubles—Maya is volatile and restless, adopted but with a sister conceived after her adoption. Joaquin has been fostered for 17 years and is convinced that he cannot allow himself to be loved, as he feels he is not worthy of such commitment. As a result, he tries to shatter the two relationships which mean most to him—with his girlfriend Birdie and his current foster parents, Mark and Linda, who want to adopt him.

Thus far, the book is entirely convincing—characters are alive, fully formed and dialogue is particularly well observed and created. The developing relationship between Grace and her friend Rafe is particularly skillfully handled and emotional challenges are often memorably and honestly described. However, when Maya and Joaquin agree to join Grace in her search for their biological mother, plot lines begin to be far too neatly tied. Their mother's details are discovered, her house visited but they are met by her sister, with news of their mother's death many years earlier and her unwavering love for them all. All other relationship problems are solved, happiness prevails and the end of the book reads rather like the script for a saccharine movie—a disappointment after such a careful exploration of some very difficult issues. **VR**

Love, Hate and Other Filters

★★★★

Samira Ahmed, Hot Key Books, 272pp, 9781471407147, £7.99pbk

Maya Aziz is a seventeen year old Indian-American Muslim living in Illinois. Her parents are loving and respectable, dentists by profession. Maya is an amateur film maker. She loves her camcorder and admits to herself that she hides behind its lens to distance herself from the turmoil of the outside world. She hopes to attend film school in New York. Her parents have other ideas, thinking of her film-making as just a teenage hobby. She'll soon grow out of it. They want her to attend the nearby university of Chicago and study medicine or the law, this as a

preliminary to marrying a nice young Indian man and providing charming grandchildren.

Maya's only supporter is her maternal aunt Hina, who lives alone in Chicago and works as a graphic designer. Will Maya get her wish? And if so at what cost to her, her family and her community? To make matters more complex, the narrative is disrupted by a terrorist incident.

Ahmed provides the reader with a rare and valuable insight into the life and problems of a young person living at the confluence of three traditions. She also compels non-Muslim readers to scrutinise their own prejudices towards those of the Muslim faith, a most valuable service. For this reviewer it was a weakness that Maya's parents were quite so oppressive, not to say tyrannical. Ahmed gives a dispiriting picture of first-generation Indian migrants to the USA. One can only hope they are not typical. **RB**

Landscape With Invisible Hand

★★★★

M.T. Anderson, Walker, 176pp, 978 0 7636 9723 5, £6.99 pbk

Set in a dystopian future America where rich business elites have traded jobs in exchange for the advanced alien technology of the colonising vuvv race, this Y.A. novel presents a bleak picture of the effects of automation and technology on a struggling population. The story is told from the point of view of Adam, a teen artist, who paints his harsh, day to day world of lost jobs, no money for food, disease-ridden water and unaffordable healthcare. Adam and his girlfriend Chloe sell their love to earn desperately needed money for their families by recording 1950s-style dates for the alien vuvv who crave 'classic' Earth culture. Adam and Chloe soon learn the effects of turning love and art into a commodity as they begin to hate each other more with every episode. When Adam is entered into a galactic art competition he has to decide how much of his soul and integrity he is willing to sacrifice when he chooses whether to submit the still lives beloved of the vuvv or his own bleak depictions of the real world.

This short, satirical novel is presented in brief, readable chapters headed by the titles of Adam's paintings and, for all its brevity, it achieves a sharp, powerful impact. It provides a realistic and coruscating social commentary on such present day problems and conflicts as the rich-poor divide, the exploitation of resources, the impossibility of any but the super-rich affording healthcare and the complete demoralisation of all those left struggling to survive while the elites inhabit the skies above in their floating apartments.

M.T. Anderson has written a timely, hard-hitting, blackly comic satire on

the dangers of a complete disconnect between the super-rich, technological elite and everyone else. The bleak end results of elevating money over human values and emotions is personalised in the sympathetic and believable character of Adam who provides a human focus throughout a novel that will leave teen readers with much to consider and discuss. **SR**

Someone to Love

★★★★

Melissa de la Cruz, Harlequin Teen, 389pp, 978-0373212361, £14.99

Olivia Blakely, known as Liv, is aged sixteen living in Los Angeles. She is the youngest of three children to a father Congressman Colin Blakely and her mother who is a lawyer. Liv is a talented artist. Her ambition is to attend art school and make a career as a painter. But her parents have other ideas. They want her to attend an Ivy League university and study for some kind of professional degree.

Her father, as the story begins, makes a momentous decision: he is to become a candidate for the governorship of California. The conflicting ambitions within the family circle generate a level of tension that is more or less intolerable. Reading de la Cruz's story, the reader witnesses Liv's slow but torturous descent into bulimia. The narrative centres on the questions whether Liv can recover her mental health and what chance she has of realising her dream of an artistic career.

There are two problems with this novel. The first 150 pages move at such a slow pace that readers other than dedicated reviewers might give the book up. It would be a pity if many readers did abandon the book, since after the first 150 pages the pace picks up and momentum is developed. It is thereafter a story worth the telling. No doubt de la Cruz has paced the build-up of her text to the moment when Liv's eating disorder is revealed. But the development is simply too slow. This reviewer also found some instances where the author seems unaware of modern conventions concerning terminology. Frieda Kahlo, who has polio, is referred to as a 'cripple'. And when Liv damages an ankle, one of her friends calls her a 'gimp'. Although in real life young people may sometimes use such expressions, using them without authorial comment in a novel for young readers is not helpful in mounting challenges to stereotypes. **RB**

My Sweet Orange Tree

★★★★

José Mauro de Vasconcelos, Pushkin Press, 192pp, 978 1782691532, £10.99 hbk

A Brazilian classic first published in 1968 this autobiographical novel gives a snapshot of the world of an underprivileged yet imaginative boy growing up in the shanty towns of Rio de Janeiro. Zezé aged five has already decided he wants to be a poet with a bow-tie when he grows up. He lives in his own make-believe world often taking his younger brother Luis to the zoo in the back yard where the chickens are tigers and panthers and the back yard becomes the countries of the world. He even befriends an orange tree at their new house and has long conversations with the tree he names Pinkie. He is wise beyond his years asking all sorts of enterprising questions to anyone who will listen. Then Zezé amazes everyone by learning to read fluently. He is sent to school a year early where a kind teacher notices his precocious ability but also feeds him when she sees he doesn't bring a snack to school. At school he is 'an angel' but it is a different story at home. He is brought up by his older siblings as his mother works and his father is unemployed so he is largely left to his own devices. He loves to play tricks on his family and neighbours and is constantly getting into dreadful scrapes and then beaten harshly for his misdemeanours.

Zezé is also a sensitive and extremely kind-hearted boy; in a heart-breaking scene he goes out on Christmas Day to shine shoes so he can bring back a present of cigarettes for his father whom he realises must feel terrible that he has not been able to provide his children with any Christmas gifts. His family, particularly his older sister Gloria, try to do the best they can in dreadful circumstances but Zezé often bears the brunt of their misery. Then at last Zezé finds a real friend. At first, he is beaten for taking a ride on the back tyre of a rich Portuguese man's car but grudgingly they come to accept one another on each other's terms and soon become firm friends. Zezé blossoms with the tender care the older man Valadares gives his young friend. And then tragedy strikes.

Told in the first person this story is full of zest and vigour yet is gut-wrenching sad in places. The brutality of the beatings would be shocking to modern day children. Zezé is a bright child who craves affection and misbehaves accordingly—more of a Brazilian Just William than a devil-child. Despite the undeniable charm of the irrepressible Zezé this is not the easiest book for a child to get stuck into. The narrative is episodic rather than flowing and demands a certain maturity. A special book for thoughtful older readers but perhaps more for classroom discussion than cosy bedtime reading. **JC**

Classics in Short No.127 Brian Alderson

Butter Crashey and the Young Men redivivus in Pauline Clarke's **The Twelve and the Genii**

2017 was the bi-centenary of Branwell Brontë's birth, good reason to open up Pauline Clarke's ingenious tribute to his talent, **The Twelve and the Genii**

Investigating the attic

of an old farmhouse into which the family has just moved, eight-year old Max finds beneath a floorboard a collection of toy soldiers wrapped in a torn rag. There were twelve of them and he set them up as a small regiment on the floor.

So much for that;

but later on, thinking to add a military air to the parade, he beat a rhythm on an Ashanti drum, an heirloom of the family, that also had been stored in the attic. The result was electrifying, bringing the leader of the soldiers to life and causing him to revivify his troupe after their long furlough and get them into parade-ground formation. It was clearly a drill that they had undertaken before but Max's startled response had the effect of returning them to frozen immobility.

Wise beyond his years,

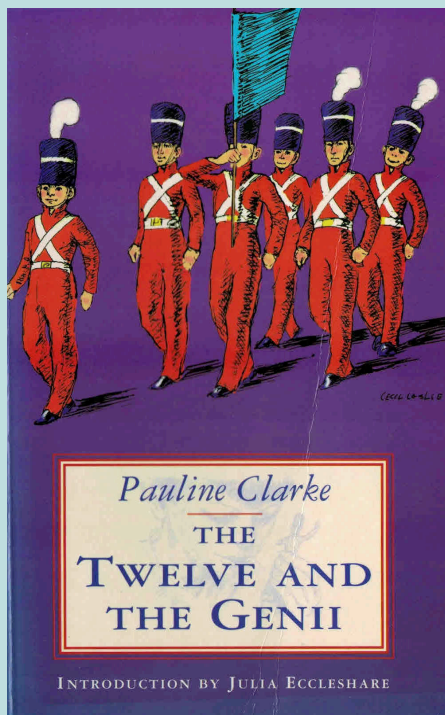
Max realizes the care he must bestow upon these unlikely house-mates, and as he wins their confidence he discovers them to be a platoon of comrades – a 'twelve', battle-scarred from what they claim to be their military experiences in Africa – indeed, among the Ashanti. They, in turn, recognise Max to be a Genii – Maxii – equivalent to four earlier such who had accompanied them many years before and had imagined them into the African adventure.

Inexplicable

though this conjunction of souls may be, and determined though Max is to embrace it as his own secret, complications cannot help but arise. His family are tolerant of what seems a new childish obsession, but the subject of the soldiers has been taken up by them. His older sister, 'on purpose by accident', discovers the Twelve while they are engaged in a ceremonial march-past and, seeing such tangible evidence of their presence demands her belief and she joins Max as a guardian (Janeii) of the secret.

The farmhouse however,

he seat of activity, lies very close to the village of Haworth in the West Riding of Yorkshire where stands the Brontë Parsonage Museum and as the children's guardianship of the Twelve proceeds



so exterior connections are made. The friendly local parson is a 'Brontëfan' (deemed by Max at first to be some sort of prehistoric animal). The Brontë children's interest in toy soldiers is revealed, since Max's mother – also a fan – has a copy of Branwell's manuscript essay 'The History of the Young Men', and here Max finds indisputable proof that the attic soldiers had come from the Parsonage and from the tutelage of his genii predecessors: Branii, Tallii, Emmii, and Annii.

A juicy coincidence

is now tossed into the brew. An American professorial Brontëfan writes to the local paper, suggesting that some local family may be the unwitting owners of the soldiers who have a recognised place in Brontë literature. He doesn't see why the treasures may not have survived and, by offering £5000 to buy such a find (a sum considerably more significant fifty-five years ago when the book was written than now) he sets in motion a plot driven by cash-centred local sentiments. The children's love of their diminutive charges, each of whom is shown to have his own individual character, must be played out under the skies of a real world.

The success of the Twelve

in finding their way back to their true home is matched by the success of the Genii Paulinii in persuading us to cheer them on. Her invention is rooted in a profound sympathy for and knowledge of those closeted children for whom the soldiers were themselves almost living characters and her story seems but a vehicle for carrying their adventures into the present. (For much of the later part of the story we follow the Twelve's own plans for the journey home, made indeed under guidance from the attendant Genii, who nonetheless have the wisdom to allow them to determine their own progress.)

In the larger scheme of things,

there is a temptation to draw parallels with other narratives that bring Lilliputian people, dolls, or toys, among what the soldiers see as the Monsters of grown people. One thinks particularly of the threats and terrors that serially confront the Borrowers while acknowledging too the less fraught shenanigans of the Racketty-Packetty House crowd or the wanderings of poor Cecco and Bulka.

But here

the tale is overlaid for readers who are beyond children's books with the tragedy of the Genii to whom the Twelve owe their being: Branii, alias Branwell Brontë. His presence is touched on in the story, not least when Butter Crashey extols the 'love ... artfulness, and ingenuity' with which he endowed his toys but it is for us now to know the tragic fate that engulfed him after their comradeship had ended. And we are never told how the Twelve came to be tucked up in a rag under the floorboards of that farmhouse.

Copies of **The Twelve and the Genii** by Pauline Clarke, published by Jane Nissen Books 978-1-9032-5209-3, are available from Amazon.

Brian Alderson is founder of the **Children's Books History Society** and a former Children's Books Editor for **The Times**. His book **The Ladybird Story: Children's Books for Everyone**, The British Library, 978-0712357289, £25.00 hbk, is out now.