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Guest Editorial 235

2019 sees celebrations for 20 years of the Waterstones Children’s Laureate. Anne Fine reviews her time as Laureate and the lasting changes brought about by the post.

When the idea of a Children’s Laureate was first put forward, I wasn’t at all keen. I’ve always thought far too much attention is paid to the personality of the author, and not nearly enough to the work itself. At the time, I was getting lots of class projects sent in by children. ‘We done a topic on you. Here it is.’ I’d read it through. They knew my favourite colour was yellow, my favourite food was toasted cheese, my favourite word was ‘silver’. But there’d be no mention of any of the books at all. I thought the Laureateship would only make things worse.

When I was invited onto the first shortlist of three, I had a long think about the opportunities the role would offer. I’d been worried about the miserable statistics showing how few books many children had in their homes. In some areas, the average was as low as three, and we all know that one of those would be The Bible or The Koran, another The Highway Code, and the third, How to Pass Your Driving Test.

On the bright side, the Labour Government was putting a huge amount of money into upgrading libraries. For the first time since Tory Minister Iain Sproat dared ask the shocking question, ‘Is there anything so special about reading that it should be made publicly available without charge?’ libraries themselves did not seem so much under threat. Talk of encouraging children to start their own ‘Home Libraries’ would not be seen as the dangerous Trojan Horse it would have been in previous years (and would again be now!)

I had a plan, and knew if I were Laureate, I could get it done. I’d always loved bookplates, and wanted a website of brilliantly designed modern bookplates anyone could freely download. ‘Make a cheap charity shop book new to you. Stick one of our bookplates over the last owner’s name and put it in your own growing home library.’

The second time round, I took the job, and with the generosity of scores of our finest illustrators, and the unflagging help of the wonderful Lois Beeson, got started on www.myhomelibrary.org Lois and I wanted to include all readers in the system, so met Marton Ripley, of ClearVisionProject.org – a lending library for blind and visually impaired children. She had a plan to interleave transparent braille text pages into picture books for blind parents to share with sighted children, and vice versa. The only thing stopping her was lack of loot. I dunned £5000 each off Jacqueline Wilson, J K Rowling, Terry Pratchett, Philip Pullman and myself. Her project was off the starting blocks, and I got to visit two high security jails, Gartree and Long Lartin, to thank the men in their brailing units.

It was an exhausting two years. Everyone wanted the Laureate to give major talks, keynote addresses, annual lectures. Depressed by how many children I met over the years who’d only ever been introduced to easy-peasy doggerel, but no actual poetry, I also put together three anthologies of classic but accessible poems for different age groups: A Shame To Miss 1, 2 & 3. Lois became mortally ill halfway through my term of office, and the other layers of protection for the Laureate had yet to be put in place. During the whole two years I never wrote a single word of fiction, and though I drove to many events, my accountant still actually phoned, dead embarrassed, to query whether I could possibly have been on all the train journeys for which I was claiming expenses. I’m proud that my projects are still going strong and I’ve watched the subsequent Laureates with interest to see how their own various interests and passions have coloured their active two years.

Indeed, I think that’s the strength of the Laureateship, and the reason why people still believe it’s a splendid idea, and other countries have begun to copy it. Just as, if you look at the professional work of the ten Laureates so far, their differences in nature and approach are startling, the same can be said of their periods in office – how they used their short term influence, what impressed them and what they chose to do with their time.

So over the years up to this special twentieth anniversary, I’ve lost pretty well all the reservations I started with about the role of Children’s Laureate. Mostly, I look forward to seeing how the opportunities it offers are seized by the next Laureate – and the next – and the next.

Anne Fine was Children’s Laureate from 2001 – 2003.
EmpathyLab 2019

In 2015 a new organisation called EmpathyLab sprung into life, drawing attention to the scientific evidence that reading builds real-life empathy skills. Since then, it has developed practical programmes to help schools, libraries and families harness the power of stories to increase children’s understanding and practice of empathy. Books for Keeps has followed its progress with interest. Here, EmpathyLab’s founder, Miranda McKearney, looks ahead to Empathy Day, and reports on a powerful refugee project with the Scouts.

Get ready for Empathy Day, 11 June

In our divided world, empathy is a beacon of hope. We founded Empathy Day to be a lightning rod for a new national conversation about the power of books to build empathy, and the power of empathy to build a better world. This year it’s on 11 June.

Empathy Day is the day to step out of our bubble and make new connections with each other. And to celebrate a dynamic new wave of empathy work in our schools and libraries. The calls to action are Read: because stories and book characters build our real-life empathy; Connect: make new connections with people, inspired by sharing stories; Do: put empathy into action, in your home and your community.

If you only have a minute, these are our recommended actions

- Tweet about #EmpathyDay to swell the national empathy conversation
- Share how a book character made you feel in the huge #ReadForEmpathy campaign
- Use our Read For Empathy Guides to choose a book for a young person (www.empathylab.uk)
- Save our Read Connect Do suggestions for another day – Empathy Day can be any day!

If you feel inspired to get more involved and want to access the wide range of Empathy Day resources subscribe to updates on www.empathylab.uk.

A new refugee project

One of Empathy Day’s functions is to act as a focal point for on-going work to build children’s empathetic understanding. An example is a powerful refugee project EmpathyLab has been working on with the Scouts, the illustrator Jane Ray, and Year 5 children from Kenilworth Primary School in Borehamwood. It has led to a new generation of children developing empathy skills and a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by displaced people.

Called Moving Connections, the project has helped children deepen their understanding of refugees’ experiences. It was initiated by the Scouts’ Heritage Service, drawing on the organisation’s proud history of supporting displaced people. In the First World War Scouts helped Belgian refugees arriving at Folkestone, and Scouts across the world are still helping refugees. This project used a collection of objects from members of the Scout International Relief Service, who were sent to European war torn countries to help in the displaced person camps. The work was funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

The project kicked off in autumn 2018 with a Year 5 workshop to raise awareness of refugees and migrants. Children looked at a selection of famous people and worked out what they had in common – they had all moved from their home country. Looking at the people in detail, the class then discovered which were refugees, and which were migrants, and explored the difference between the two terms.

Deciding which five items to pack if they had to flee their home, the class agreed that money would be useful! The top five things packed were money, mobile phone, games console and touchingly, a family photo.

An activity which aimed to show the class the commonalities between themselves and refugees saw them write down their likes and dislikes, and then finding matches amongst their classmates. The main commonality was that they were all human.

In the plenary the class showed they understood that refugees are just like you and I, humans. And although we might not speak the same language, we can connect with people through similar likes and hobbies. One girl when asked, ‘What would you do if a refugee joined your class?’ immediately said, “I would respect them, not judge them and be their friend”.

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Jane Ray was chosen as the artist to work with Kenilworth’s children. She has first-hand experience, because she runs a class at the Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants, with author Sita Brahmachari. One of EmpathyLab’s aims is to help children recognise a wider range of emotions, in order to understand themselves and others better. Jane’s wonderful, expressive artwork is a powerful springboard, and many of her books have empathy at their heart.

Jane collaborated with Year 5, creating artwork that helped the children to empathise with the refugee experience. Time spent ‘Empathy BookSpotting’ inspired the class to focus on books with refugee and empathy themes, and they contributed books recommendations on luggage labels. These included Francesca Sanna’s The Journey; Kate Milner’s My Name is Not Refugee, Judith Kerr’s When Hitler Stole the Pink Rabbit, and Morris Gleitzman’s Boy Overboard.

The children worked with Jane to draw a variety of facial expressions, exploring how to ‘read’ feelings. The idea of flight, migration and freedom manifested itself in the form of ‘Wish Birds’, where the class wrote wishes for a child refugee arriving in the country. One response, “I wish everyone could be treated equally” shows the power of their understanding.

The third workshop took place at the Scouts Headquarters at Gilwell Park, Chingford. The class learnt about Scouts’ contribution on the Home Front during both World Wars and activity in Prisoner of War camps. Children explored objects which brought the learning to life. Inspired by these, the class created artworks, including letters thanking the Scouts, and comic strips from both the perspective of a Scout and a refugee.

Further workshops have created postcards to be sent to refugee transit camps in Greece and Sudan where Scouts are working, and an Empathy Tree which explores the empathetic vocabulary learnt by the children throughout the project. One session looked at campaigning and activism, which resulted in the class creating their own campaign placards in support of refugees. The children also wrote a letter to their MP, expressing their hopes for refugees arriving in the UK.

In our second workshop we explored symbolism, how simple images can represent something bigger and more emotional. For example, the bird representing freedom, and the tree representing growth and strength, with its buds and blossom, leaves and fruit representing new hope and development. The Empathy Tree is our response to these ideas, and was created by the whole class – a truly collaborative work!

In our final workshop together, everyone was given a postcard on which to paint a brightly coloured bird. On the back they wrote a hopeful and friendly message. These will be reproduced and posted to children who are currently living in refugee camps and temporary homes in other parts of the world – the children of Kenilworth Primary School holding out their hands to children of similar age whose lives have been torn apart by war and upheaval.

I have loved my time with Year 5. Through the art activities, working with the Scouts, the sharing of books, and the resulting discussion and thought, the children have developed a much deeper and more empathetic understanding of the refugee experience and our response to it.”

All the material was brought together in a moving exhibition at the Mill Green Museum.

Some EmpathyLab resources for schools and libraries

- **Read For Empathy** book collections, curated by an expert panel. 30 books for primary aged children, and 15 for secondary. You can download the linked Guides from [www.empathylab.uk](http://www.empathylab.uk), and buy the collections at a 26% discount at [www.peters.co.uk/empathy2019](http://www.peters.co.uk/empathy2019).

- **Toolkits for Empathy Day:** there are three toolkits with creative ideas and resources. To find the one right for you, go to [www.empathylab.uk](http://www.empathylab.uk).

- **Training:** EmpathyLab now offers training. Enquiries to miranda@empathylab.uk

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**Jane Ray: the illustrator’s role**

“I ran three workshop days at Kenilworth. The idea of birds as symbols of freedom is a recurring theme in my work and in our first session, having read my book Ahmed and the Feather Girl, the children created Wish Birds. They imagined what it might be like to have to leave their homeland, and then wrote hopes and wishes on the birds’ pleated paper wings.

As an illustrator I need to be able to show facial expressions to tell a story, and after reading The Unicorn Prince, we experimented with drawing expressions on blank faces.

We talked about how we interpret what people might be feeling through their expressions. The children also drew self-portraits and thought about how they communicate their own feelings.

We talked about how to ‘read’ feelings. The idea of flight, migration and freedom manifested itself in the form of ‘Wish Birds’, where the class wrote wishes for a child refugee arriving in the country. One response, “I wish everyone could be treated equally” shows the power of their understanding.

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At last, the LGBTQI+ novel comes of age

Michael Lee Richardson celebrates the best new writing for young LGBTQI+ readers.

2019 marks 50 years since the Stonewall riots, the protests by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people which took place in the early hours of 28th June 1969 at the Stonewall Inn in New York City. Originally a demonstration against violent police raids, the riots are the reason we now have Pride during the summer, and are considered the catalyst for the current fight for LGBTQI+ liberation in the West.

In the same month, June 1969, John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* was published. Widely recognised as one of the first LGBT novels for young adult readers, *I'll Get There* follows Davy Ross, a 13 year old who finds himself moving back home with his alcoholic mother following his grandmother's death. It's hardly cheery stuff, and Davy cuts a lonely figure until he meets Douglas, a classmate at his school. The two boys become fierce friends, eventually kissing and hugging while sharing a bed, with other, less easily smuggled past the radar activities hinted at ('making out' and 'doing it' feature heavily).

LGBTQI+ literature for young adults has come a long way since Davy and Douglas 'making out', but some of the key themes – of love and relationships and self-discovery – remain the same today. My own journey with LGBTQI+ YA began in 2003, with the publication of David Levithan’s *Boy Meets Boy*, a riotous romantic comedy that takes the old trope of 'boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back' and tickles it pink.

Reading it as a 17 year old, *Boy Meets Boy* was a revelation, a queer story - in more ways than one – where all the tropes of LGBTQI+ YA past were turned on their heads. This wasn’t a world where gay and lesbian characters (bisexual and transgender people barely existed in early 2000s YA) lived sad or secretive lives, usually dying before the last page; this was a world peopled by people like me, where the 'boy meets boy' love story was almost mundane against a backdrop of cheerleaders on Harleys, a gay-straight alliance formed to help the straight kids learn how to dance, and a drag queen quarterback named Infinite Darlene.

One of the most exciting things about having my story *The Other Team* published in Stripes Publishing's *PROUD* has been being featured alongside Levithan's own story, *As the Philadelphia Queer Youth Choir Sings Katy Perry's 'Firework'...*, a playful ensemble story about an LGBTQI+ ensemble, illustrated by Steve Anthony. Compiled by Juno Dawson, *PROUD* features a host of UK authors and illustrators who all identify as LGBTQI+ writing and illustrating on the theme of ‘pride’.

The contents page is a good starting point for readers who want to read more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or just plain queer writers, and find more LGBTQI+ stories. For someone like me, who loves Young Adult contemporary, standout stories include Penguins by Simon James Green, whose novels *Noah Can't Even* and *Noah Could Never* bring some much-needed levity to the queer literary experience; it is, as I've often iterated, absolutely excellent being gay.

Green's story is illustrated by Alice Oseman, whose own books and comics offer up whole casts of queer characters who run the gamut of gender identities and sexual orientations. Other favourites include Moïra Fowley-Doyle’s *Lose Poems to the City*, a timely story about the fight for marriage equality in Ireland, with a bisexual protagonist; and Fox Benwell's *The Courage of Dragons*, about a non-binary teenager and their Dungeons & Dragons group. Having worked with LGBTQI+ young people for almost a decade – as a youth worker with LGBT Youth Scotland, and now for LEAP Sports, a charity which works for greater inclusion for LGBTI people in sport – the *PROUD* anthology represents communities I know and communities I'm part of (I'm queer, and I also play Dungeons & Dragons).

This is the type of book that I know the young people I work with will want to read, with characters like them and stories like theirs. In an increasingly difficult climate - not a week goes by when trans young people don't find their identities questioned or criticised in national newspapers in a way which echoes tabloid stories of 'perverted' lesbian and gay people in the 1980s - it's more important than ever that LGBTQI+ young people see themselves reflected in the countries cultural life and in our libraries, with positive role models both on and off the page.
For me, more trans representation remains a priority. There have been excellent books with trans protagonists over the last few years: Lisa Williamson channeled her experiences as an administrator for the Tavistock Centre, a Gender Identity Clinic with a specific service for children and young people, into her book The Art of Being Normal, a witty, charming coming of age novel about a young trans woman coming out at school. Alice Oseman thanks a long list of trans men who helped her research and write Jimmy Kaga-Ricci, a young trans man, one of two protagonists in her most recent novel, I Was Born for This, an absolute belter of a boyband book. Oseman also features a non-binary character – someone whose gender identity falls outside of traditional, binary notions of ‘man’ or ‘woman’ – in her novel Radio Silence. Juno Dawson is a fantastic role model for trans young people, and I would love to see more trans writers writing for young adults. The same need for representation is true of young people with intersectional identities. 2019 has already seen the publication of Canadian author Sabina Khan’s book The Love and Lies of Rukhsana Ali, about a young Muslim girl who is sent to live with her grandparents in Bangladesh after she’s caught kissing her girlfriend and I’m particularly looking forward to The Black Flamingo by Dean Atta, whose poem How to Come Out as Gay rounds off the PROUD anthology. The novel in verse, about a mixed-race gay teenager coming to terms with his identity, tells the story of the young protagonist creating his drag persona.

As young people are able to identify themselves as LGBTQI+ earlier and earlier, work for younger readers is going to become increasingly important. Alongside a handful of US titles – including Raina Telgemeier’s Drama and Better Nate Than Ever by Tim Federle – standouts from UK authors include Keris Stainton’s Starring Kitty, in which a light-hearted lesbian love story plays out against a backdrop of more serious themes of family crisis. WAIN – a collection of queer retellings of Scottish myths and legends (featuring gay giants, a trans boy Selkie and a non-binary Nessie) by Rachel Plummer – is published this month by The Emma Press. The Pants Project, about a young trans boy who has to fight his school dress code, by Scottish author Cat Clarke – who’s also written books with LGBTQI+ protagonists and themes for young adults - has been published in the US, but is yet to find a UK publisher.

The publication last month of Lev Rosen’s Jack of Hearts (and Other Parts) – which journalist Alim Kheraj has championed across a number of publications – feels like an exciting sign of things to come; a witty, charming and emotionally-charged story, which deals with sex and sexuality in a way that’s frank and funny (sample line: ‘My first time getting it in the butt was kind of weird’). We’ve come a long way from Davy and Douglas ‘making out’, and books like Jack of Hearts and projects like PROUD feel like a taste of what’s to come if LGBTQI+ writers are given the space to write for the communities we know and the communities we’re a part of – and an exciting time for those of us who love it.

I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip, John Donovan, Golden Hoard Press, 978-0738721347, £7.60
PROUD, Various, Stripes, 978-1788950602, £7.99 pbk
Noah Can’t Even, Simon James Green, Scholastic, 978-1407179940, £7.99 pbk
The Love and Lies of Rukhsana Ali, Sabina Khan, Egmont, 978-1407194578, £7.99
The Art of Being Normal, Lisa Williamson, David Fickling Books, 978-1910200520, £7.99 pbk
I Was Born for This, Alice Oseman, HarperCollins Children’s Books, 978-0008244095, £7.99 pbk
Starring Kitty, Keris Stainton, Catnip Publishing, 978-184671841, £7.99 pbk
WAIN, Rachel Plummer, the Emma Press, 978-1910139479, £12.00
Jack of Hearts (and Other Parts), L.C. Rosen, Penguin, 978-0241365014, £7.99 pbk

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Authorgraph
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Julia Golding
Interviewed by
Imogen Russell Williams

A buzzing bookshop café in Oxford feels like an appropriate place to discuss Julia Golding’s erudite, intriguing new books: The Curious Crime, an alternate history for middle-grade readers, and The Curious Science Quest, a younger series of time-travel adventures focused on the history of science. Golding is best known for her Cat Royal books, set in eighteenth-century theatrical London (the first in the series, The Diamond of Drury Lane, won both the Waterstones Children’s Book Prize and the Nestle Children’s Book Prize in 2006). She has ranged far and wide as a writer, however, writing books under different names, for different ages and set in very different periods – dark teen thrillers as Joss Stirling, Elizabethan historical fiction as Eve Edwards, and mythological creatures, Arthurian legends, Victorian butlers, Vikings and pirates as Julia Golding. Is there a quintessential element that always appears in her work?

‘Perhaps a certain gentleness,’ she says, quoting an early review – as well as a willingness to see things from the villain’s point of view. Golding is fond of her bad eggs, in fact, and likes to remind herself that ‘everyone is the hero of their own story’, providing her readers with nuanced, at least slightly sympathetic portraits of all her characters.

Her own career has had a fascinating range – after reading English at Cambridge, she joined the Foreign Office, and took up diplomatic work in Poland. Returning to Britain, she studied for a doctorate in Romantic literature at Oxford before joining Oxfam as a lobbyist, though she now writes full time. As a child, her favourite books included Elizabeth Goudge’s ‘adorable fantasy’ The Little White Horse, and Frances Hodgson Burnett’s The Secret Garden and A Little Princess; especially the latter, in which Sara Crewe ‘creates a world out of her imagination, to make her own reality bearable.’ She enjoyed The Lord of the Rings, too, for its vision of ‘British countryside writ large’, the everyday made sublime. The rich, resonant sense of these fully-formed imaginary worlds is clear in her own work.

In beginning a new story, Golding admits, she also looks for ‘complete worlds’ that she can build. The vast museum in which The Curious Crime is set is a prime example; a building both discrete and seemingly infinite, isolated by its island situation and fascinatingly rife with wandering wildlife and straying students. Part Gormenghast, part Hogwarts, part Holmesian mind palace, it’s the ideal setting both for a murder mystery and for walking the reader gently through the history of science via its uncountable halls, exhibits and corridors.

Golding chose to set the story in an alternate Victorian era partly because she felt the science of the period was well illustrated by a museum (unlike, say, general relativity and quantum mechanics). It’s also a period characterised by intense debates about women’s education, and she wanted to ask: what if the debate went backwards? ‘What if, when Darwin came up with his version of biological evolution, [some scientists] took it in an extreme way, and used it to justify existing biases in society?’ In The Curious Crime, which she describes as her own ‘thought experiment’, societal prejudice against women and people of different ethnicities has been justified by a dubious Darwinism taken to anti-religious extremes. To suggest belief in a creator of any kind is now anathema; to work as a mason, if you’re female, a monstrous transgression. In the first few pages, Golding’s heroine, Maria ‘Ree’ Altamira, does both. Defiant, tenacious, an accomplished stonemason with an excellent head for heights and an adored, indulged dodo companion, Ree is an instantly engaging protagonist. How much does Golding have in common with her heroine?

‘Well, I like doing things with my hands, but I haven’t actually had a go at stonemasonry. And I’m not bad at heights, but I probably wouldn’t offer to be a roofer in another life…’ The relationship between Ree and her dodo, Philoponus, however, is based on the bond between Golding and her cockapoo. (Philoponus’ name is a nod to the forgotten scientist who ran Galileo’s famous ‘falling bodies’ experiment, centuries before the Leaning Tower of Pisa was even built; Ree’s full name, meanwhile, is borrowed from Altamira, a site in Northern Spain where early cave drawings were discovered. ‘It was actually a little girl who was there with her father; she was really small, about seven or eight, and she crawled through a hole that he couldn’t get through, and came back and said: “Papa, there are oxen on the walls.”’)

Golding allows Phil the dodo and other extraordinary creatures – a Tasmanian wolf, a Javan tiger, a python, a macaque – to roam throughout the museum partly just for the fun of it. ‘But, also, there is a serious point to be made there about extinction – I wanted to say these are gone, we’ve lost these creatures, and to remind the reader of their amazingness. All of the main animals, apart from the macaque, are extinct.’ As menageries were part of the scientific way of teaching, giving the museum dedicated zoological gardens makes
The cast of characters is diverse throughout – the book's other protagonist, Henri Volp, for instance, is an Algerian scholar, pioneering the forensic science of fingerprints – and the place itself remains unnamed. 'I wanted to make clear that science doesn't just belong to the Western tradition...and I wanted someone to be reading the book in America or France and to be thinking it could be happening in their country. I wanted that feeling of a little city-state, that could be anywhere, so I deliberately went for quite an international flavour, making it feel it didn't belong to any particular history of any particular country, but was actually the history of science.'

Ill-feeling runs high within the closed world of the museum, however, with phrenologists defending dubious observations, students competing for kudos and resources, and despised maids, denied formal education, picking up furtive scraps of information. But when a murderer strikes, Henri the scholar and Ree, stonemason turned skivvy, must pool their skills and knowledge to solve the mystery – discovering more about the museum's secrets than they could ever have imagined in the process. Hidden renegades, the complex balance of faith and science, the necessity of the scientific method and the dangers of attachment to debunked theories all run through this thought-provoking, quick-paced crime-and-creatures caper, enticing its readers to explore the museum island in their own minds.

The Curious Science Quests series, meanwhile, came about very differently. 'Normally, when I write a book, I just think of an idea and then get on with it.' This time, however, Golding was asked to adapt The Penultimate Curiosity, a book for adults dealing with enquiry, science and philosophy, by Andrew Briggs, professor of nanomaterials, and artist and poet Roger Wagner, both of whom are friends of Golding's. 'They said, could you turn this into a book for kids? And I said I can't do one book – there's too much here. So I suggested slicing it up into six parts, and then I came up with the idea of how to do it – with time travel.' The series' protagonists are Harriet, a tortoise collected by Charles Darwin and brought home to England in his suitcase, and Milton, a cat belonging to Erwin Schrödinger, a pleasingly unlikely duo who travel through time to witness moments of significant scientific discovery. Impressive figures have provided input: 'When I first started working on it, and I did a sample text to show – some pages about the possibility of time-travel – I sent them off to Andrew, thinking he was going to check it. But no - about two weeks later, he said "I've showed what you wrote to the Astronomer Royal, Lord Rees, and he's given you this feedback." And then a week later I got another email, saying "I was at a conference in Cambridge, and I showed what you'd done to Stephen Hawking, and here's his feedback!" So I got a short paragraph of feedback about the paradoxes of time travel from Stephen Hawking - and I thought, well, that's it, my career has peaked!' The series is humorous, light-touch and highly illustrated, with cartoon-style images by Brett Hudson and try-at-home experiments interspersed. It has some weighty points to make, too: There's a bit in the last book about how society needs to engage with science, because science is taking big decisions which affect all of us. We can destroy the world now, for instance. You can't just disengage from science if you don't understand it. As well as the fun and games and time travel, it has that running underneath.' One of Golding's major contributions was to put in women wherever possible, and to try and avoid the 'history of dead white guys - which is a struggle. It is largely a history of dead white guys, because they're the ones who got recorded.' Nevertheless, she explains, 'the word 'scientist' itself was coined by Mr Whewell in 1833, in order to include Mary Somerville...Scientist is a neutral word, and has been all the way through, since the beginning.'

The Curious Crime, Lion, 978-0745977874, £6.99 pbk
The Curious Science Quest: Cave Discovery, Lion, 978-0745977447, £6.99 pbk
The Curious Science Quest: Greek Adventure, Lion, 978-0745977454, £6.99 pbk
The Curious Science Quest: Rocky Road to Galileo, Lion, 978-0745977522, £6.99 pbk
The Diamond of Drury Lane, Egmont, 978-1405285308, £6.99 pbk

Imogen Russell Williams is a journalist and editorial consultant specialising in children's literature and YA.
I've only recently noticed how many of the series I loved most as a child featured a protagonist who sought out their adventures in a different setting for each book. The globe-trotting Tintin was a particular favourite, but there were many others like it to open the world up to us young readers. Many of my non-fiction regulars were the same, now I think about it. Where children today might pore over Maps (that large-format marvel from Aleksandra Mizielinska and Daniel Mizielinski) to get their vicarious taste of the what the rest of this planet has to offer, in my childhood we collected the distinctive works of M. Šašek, in those days seemingly ubiquitous – This Is London, and many others in the series. (If you had them as a child, I bet you can still picture exactly how they looked, too.)

And, I suppose, my tastes haven’t totally changed since then; it’s certainly true that many of my recent favourite literary heroes are themselves also pretty well-travelled. I’ve lately explored Lisbon and India, and various places between, in the company of Sally Jones, for instance; if you haven’t yet experienced the brilliant The Murderer’s Ape, I recommend that journey, and Sally Jones’s company, most highly.

I also loved the Moomins, naturally, though they were rather more valley-bound. (I mean, what kind of monster wouldn’t love The Moomins?) And Fattypuffs and Thinifers, of course, with those fantastic Fritz Wegner illustrations; though I suspect it’s not as widely read today it should be, André Maurois’ story of the unifying of two seemingly irreconcilable nations is a proper, solid-gold, unimprovable classic. Like the Moomins, I know I’ll remember that one till the day I die – as any BfK reader will know; that’s so often the case with favourite books from childhood, isn’t it? To this day, I can’t see a sky-blue suit without thinking of Conrad, the Factory-Made Boy… (If you don’t know this Christine Nöstlinger gem, it’s about a boy who is accidentally delivered – in a tin can, obviously – to the wrong house; a great book about, and against, conformity.)

What I remember relatively little from childhood, curiously, are the folk-tales and fairy-tales – I must have heard them, I suppose, but they aren’t what stayed with me. Though I’m increasingly fascinated by them now, by the stories that seem to pop up wherever in the world people build a community together, and which are retold, shared, adapted, passed down. I travel a lot (not quite as much as Tintin, but nearly) and every culture has its rich tradition – perfect for investigating on a holiday destination, I always feel. You can read the Slovakian traditional tales collected by Pavol Dobsinský when you’re weekending in Bratislava, Ivana Brlic Mazuranic’s Croatian tales in Zagreb, Trevor Zahra’s retelling of local folk tales if you happen to find yourself in Malta (the attractive Hrejef Maltin collection comes with a CD), or – if in Romania – some more recent stories in the collection by Mircea Sintimbeau (My Book of Twenty-Two Stories for Children). The things they have in common and the things that make them unique are equally fascinating; they don’t only enchant us, they teach us so much about each other, too. Libraries in our teemingly multicultural UK should be full of such things, really.

I haven’t been a child for quite some time, obviously, but children’s books remain important to me, and so I’ve managed rather cannily to build some of my work around them. I’ve edited collections of stories (including a couple of volumes for the Hay Festival’s Aarhus39 project, featuring writers like Cathy Clement, with her story Mediterranean Cruise, and Andri Antoniou, with hers, Why Rudolph Went to Rome Last Summer); and when I’m lucky I get to review children’s books, too: Evelina Daciuté and Aušra Kiudulaité’s picture book The Fox on the Swing (those lovely eye-catching illustrations) and Luize Pastore’s tremendously winning novel Dog Town most recently.

Oh, and talking about dogs (and, in this case, talking about talking dogs), I’ve also over the years come to judge a number of children’s books prizes, which in one case allowed me to reward one of the greatest children’s literary dogs of all, the eponymous heroine of Bernardo Atxaga’s Shola, a rather self-regarding, but very funny little animal who features in many spirited stories. (The same round of judging, incidentally, introduced me to Anton and Piranha – another of those books that never seems to have

In a specially extended Ten of the Best, Daniel Hahn takes us on a journey via 27 books you should read.
got the attention it deserved and I can't understand why. It's a warm-hearted and hilarious story about a boy and a fish who meet on holiday and become the unlikeliest of friends – I never pass up an opportunity to recommend it.) Though at the risk of disloyalty to my beloved Shola, I should also mention a more recent passion: the gloriously enjoyable Elise and the Second-Hand Dog. Naturally, this dog talks, too, though this time in an unexpected Scottish accent. (And OK, in the interest of fairness, I do just occasionally also like some cat books. Read The Cat Who Came in off the Roof if you haven't already – it's a treat. It's by the legendary Annie M.G. Schmidt.) I've even translated some books myself, including many picture books – if you don't know it, look at Don't Cross the Line, by Isabel Minhós Martins and Bernardo Carvalho, an incredibly clever look at how to challenge arbitrary authority built into a simple picture-book conceit. Translating a picture book can be harder than you think, by the way – so few words, but they have to work with such density and detail, and speak to their images. Just consider something like Chris Haughton's work, a book like A Bit Lost (he's another favourite of mine) – apart from everything else, there's such incredible precision. When I Want to Keep Silent by Zornitsa Christova and Kiril Zlatkov (a young bear's thoughts on the strength of words and silence) contains fewer than eighty words, but great beauty and sophistication. Of course, some of the most powerful of all picture books are totally wordless, which could allow sensible publishers to do without pesky translators entirely. I've just this week been introduced to Maja Kastelic's beautiful A Boy and a House, which happens to be from Slovenia, but you wouldn't know it – apart from the jacket, you have no way of knowing that it happens to be a book without any Slovene words rather than without any English words... (The one thing even harder for a translator than picture books is poetry, of course; but I try my best to avoid that sort of work myself – yes, I'm a glutton for punishment, but only within reason. Others do it wonderfully, though: if you doubt that, The Emma Press have just published a charming and delightfully peculiar collection by Contra, Everyone’s the Smartest.)

Lest my choices above make you wonder whether my personal taste in children's books is overwhelmingly young and light and quirky, I should probably mention a couple of counterexamples (both for older readers) – how about the Marsh Award-winning In the Sea There Are Crocodiles, based on the real testimony of an Afghan refugee, so gripping and so filled with compassion? Or Tina's Web, another story about a young person forced to cross a continent and make a new home, but in altogether different circumstances? That one's by Alki Zei, a children's/YA writer not much known here but who was a real ground-breaker in her native Greece. But yes, OK, allow me one more not-altogether-serious story to round things off, because the latest book to arrive in the post this week is called Arnica, by Ervin Lázár, and it's a fairy-tale about kindness and ducks (among other things). I love it. It's only just out – order yourself a copy today. So – a very grand total of twenty-seven stories! Placed side by side, they are stories about travel and bravery and discovery; about freedom; about striving to be better and surprising ourselves. They are enlightening and various and fun, heart-warming and heart-breaking. They are stories about celebrating our differences and forming unlikely friendships, often in unexpected circumstances. What else do they have in common? Each of my chosen twenty-seven stories comes from a different one of the twenty-seven countries who will continue, hereafter, to constitute the European Union. To me, their stories add up to something immeasurably precious, for which I've never been more thankful. What good fortune, what a privilege, to have shared them.

Daniel Hahn is a writer, editor and translator, and somebody who should know better than to write an article about international books without naming any of the translators. (Translators have a strictly enforced #namethetranslator campaign, which this article is quite spectacularly failing to respect; Daniel Hahn apologises grovelingly to his friends and won't do it again.)
Windows into illustration: Laura Hughes

Laura Hughes is the illustrator of There’s a Pig Up My Nose, winner of the Oscar’s Book Prize 2018, as well as We’re Going on Elf Chase and the Ruby Roo stories. Her loose, energetic illustrations are instantly recognizable. Here she describes the process involved in creating the illustrations for Mummy’s Suitcase by Pip Jones.

Mummy’s Suitcase, by Pip Jones is the fourth title in the Ruby Roo picture book series, following on from Daddy’s Sandwich, The Chocolate Monster, and Quick Barney RUN! The books feature the main protagonist, Ruby Roo, and sometimes her mum, dad and baby brother Barney.

Pip is such a brilliant and funny writer, and I love all the ‘Mum jokes’ she has included in the story. I feel very lucky to have been able to work with her on the Ruby Roo books.

The image I’ve chosen to talk about features later on in the book. Mum is going away and Ruby decides to pack her Mum’s prized roses for her, because she knows her mum loves them, but she’s obviously been warned not to touch them, so she decides to dig them up instead! Ruby isn’t being intentionally naughty though; she is just trying to be helpful in the best way she knows how to.

Mummy loves the roses, but I’m not allowed to pick them, so . . .
I mostly work ‘traditionally’, using gouache paints and inks to create my artwork. The backgrounds are painted as one piece, and then I add the characters towards the end. I do use Photoshop, but I keep it to an absolute minimum, usually to quickly alter a colour, or to correct a mistake.

I start my colour illustrations by tracing over my rough ink drawing using a light box. Then, when I’m happy with the layout, I add washes of colour in ink. I do this part quite quickly and dunk the ink onto the paper in a very rough way. I usually make a terrible mess, but sometimes the mistakes make the painting more interesting! (pic 1)

When the first wash of colour is dry, I add outlines and a few of the bigger details, such as leaves, using a dip pen. (pic 2)

Lastly, I paint the flowers and other small details, such as the bees and the butterflies, and add more texture and depth by building up layers of ink. The watering can and the decking are drawn separately on scraps of found paper and collaged into the piece before scanning. I add skin tone digitally as the flat colour acts as a contrast to the texture in the hair and clothes of my characters. (pic 3)

My absolute favourite part of making a picture book is creating lots of things for children to spot. If you’re familiar with Daddy’s Sandwich you might recall that Ruby creates a really silly sandwich made of all the things that her Daddy REALLY loves. For added fun, I have hidden all the ingredients from his sandwich throughout the pages of Mummy’s Suitcase. Can you spot them all?

Mummy’s Suitcase is published by Faber & Faber, 978 0 571 327539, £6.99 pbk
Protest and the British Children’s Book

In the latest in their Beyond the Secret Garden articles, Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O’Connor find rebellion and riot in children’s literature

In Emile (1762) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, rejecting the prevailing Christian notion of original sin, argued that children are born innocent and only become corrupted through experience. This view influenced the so-called ‘Golden Age of Children’s Literature’ and its legacy can be detected in contemporary children’s fiction. If we are motivated to preserve childhood ‘innocence’, we are likely to avoid narratives of injustice and protest.

Writing about British children’s books published in 1968, a year of global revolution, Lucy Pearson comments that “the cultural revolution of the sixties was incompatible with the world of children’s books – or at least with the wholesome ‘butter and eggs’ image of a mainstream publisher” (The Right to Read: Children’s Rights and Children’s Publishing in Britain). But as the 1960s turned into the 1970s, protest and even riots became more prominent in children’s books, both fictional and nonfictional, and this is at least partly due to writers of colour and other citizens who increasingly stood up for their rights in Britain. Many pre-1970 children’s books dealing with protest and riots were written by authors who grew up in the Caribbean. V. S. Reid’s 1960 novel Sixty-Five, about the 1865 Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica, was published by Longmans primarily for Caribbean readers, although the book was printed in London. The historical nature of the book and its anti-colonial stance responded to the independence movement in Jamaica, was published by Longmans primarily for Caribbean readers, and the Jamaican-born Andrew Salkey’s books provided a picture of the world they had left behind. Salkey created his Disaster Quartet for Oxford University Press, and the books were published in Britain. The four books contrasted the difficulties of life in the Caribbean with the benefits of the warm family life that many experienced in the islands. The final book in the series, Riot (1967), depicts a modern-day workers’ rights protest in Kingston that develops into a riot. Salkey’s British audience would have been mostly white at the time of publication; although the narrative mostly focuses on the role of class (particularly the abject poverty of Kingston slums) in initiating the riot, the middle-class family who act as the book’s protagonists suggest that there is an additional, underlying reason for the unrest. The father of the family, surveying the destruction caused, thought of life in the Islands’ very early years of slavery, then he thought of its colonial status, and he recalled words like ‘exploitation’, ‘inferiority’ and ‘despair’ (163). Salkey never directly blames British colonialism, but the implication is clear. Following the publication of this book, Salkey left Oxford University Press to work as editor and writer for the newly-established Black British press, Bogle L’Ouverture. His final work for children, published with Bogle L’Ouverture, Danny Jones (1980) moved the idea of protesting police harassment to London, but ultimately, the protagonist considers leaving Britain for Jamaica because he doesn’t see the situation improving for his generation of young Black Britons. Class-based protest can be solved, according to Salkey, but racially-based protest is futile.

This is borne out in other children’s books published around the same time. A. Sivanandan, head of the Institute of Race Relations, began publishing a series about racism in Britain in the early 1980s; the third book in the series, How Racism Came to Britain (1985) included depictions of Black British protest “to resist racist attacks in light of police indifference” (40). The book, which was used in London schools, was singled out by Secretary for Education Kenneth Baker as “aggressive”; he called for its removal from school libraries. Marjorie Darke’s A Long Way to Go (Kestrel 1978) is an unusually early depiction in children’s books of a Black British family during World War I (and part of Darke’s sequence of books depicting a Black British family from slavery to the twentieth century). Luke Knight, the book’s male protagonist, refuses to sign up for military service, because “I can’t do what ain’t right” (99). Luke is at first alone in his protest, and because his brown skin makes him more visible, he receives considerable verbal and physical abuse. However, he holds his ground and gains supporters and friends. Although he is nearly killed several times, he survives to the end of the war to become a sculptor, creating rather than destroying. His race makes him stand out, but because he is not protesting racial inequity, his protest is ultimately successful.

Among Luke’s supporters in A Long Way to Go are the suffragettes, particularly the real-life suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst. While Emmeline Pankhurst supported the war in the hopes of gaining parliament’s support for women’s suffrage after the war (she succeeded in this),
Emmeline's daughter Sylvia was a known anti-war campaigner, who argued that the war was a class issue—since most of the men who died were poor and working-class. The women's suffrage movement is often seen as a white British protest movement, but recently, several children's books have been published that include the protest of Indian princess Sophia Duleep Singh. Two recent books that include Singh are David Roberts' *Suffragette: The Battle for Equality* (Two Hoots 2018), which pictures Singh (presumably) on the front cover as well as giving her a two-page spread inside, and Kira Cochrane's *Modern Women: 52 Pioneers* (Frances Lincoln 2017). Roberts keeps the focus of Singh's transformation to radicalism on being "troubled" (36) by the way the British had treated her family, but Cochrane's book specifically mentions Singh's "loathing" for the British Empire after her visit to India. For women of colour, suffrage was not just about the right to vote; it was about the right to represent themselves and be heard as people of subjugated nations. For years, Singh's story was lost to child readers, and those that do depict her often shy away from her anti-colonial attitudes. It is acceptable to depict Singh as part of a battle that white British women dominated, but rarely is her post-war work to raise awareness of the contribution of Indian soldiers recognized, an effort which, according to Mannmeet Bali Nag, “triggered near-panic among the stalwarts of Whitehall and New Delhi” (https://ponderingpauses.wordpress.com/2018/03/10/sikh-princess-suffragette-sophia-duleep-singh/). Singh, like the fictional Luke Knight, is celebrated for her radicalism, but only when the issue is not racially-based.

Recently, Angie Thomas' YA debut *The Hate U Give*, and Breanna J. McDanels' debut picture-book *Hands Up* (in the USA) and Mohammed Khan's debut *I am Thunder* and Sita Bramachari's *Tender Earth* (in the UK) all offer narratives where children and young people of colour engage in protest over injustices they have experienced.

Onjali Q. Rauf's 2018 debut, the Blue Peter Book Award winning *The Boy at the Back of the Class* can be read as a careful negotiation between ideas of 'childhood innocence' and a narrative of protest against injustice. When the nine-year-old protagonist learns that her new classmate Ahmet is a refugee who has been separated from his parents, she wishes to help. An unlikely plan to visit the Queen proves to be the catalyst for a happy ending. This may not seem like the most realistic portrayal of social protest. Yet Rauf deftly includes neighbours and politicians with racist views – whilst refraining from using racist epithets for her middle-grade audience. The first person narrative offers us light-hearted moments of innocence – just what does a deputy headteacher do if the headteacher is never absent? – yet we get a sense that our mixed-race narrator has grown up with some sense of injustice and that her friendship with Ahmet leads not to a rude awakening but rather an extension of her understanding of the world.

**The Making of Modern Children's Literature in Britain:**
*Publishing and Criticism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Studies in Childhood, 1700 to the Present), Lucy Pearson, Routledge, 978-1138252189, £37.99


**Modern Women: 52 Pioneers**, Kira Cochrane, Frances Lincoln, 978-0711237896, £20.00 hbk

**I Am Thunder**, Mohammed Khan, Macmillan Children’s Books, 9781509874057, £7.99 pbk

**The Boy at the Back of the Class**, Onjali Rauf, Orion Children’s Books, 978-1510105010, £6.99 pbk
Matt Brown chooses a Woking-set, sci-fi classic.

I think the book I most wish I’d written is H.G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds*. It was written in the dying embers of the 19th century but it feels so modern and so relevant even at a distance of more than one hundred and twenty years. *The War of the Worlds* tells the story of a brutal, devastating alien attack from Mars. I’m a sucker for sci-fi that’s set on earth, which *The War of the Worlds* most certainly is. It takes place in Woking for flip’s sake and has chapter titles like, *The Heat-Ray in the Cobham Road*. The idea of alien-life can seem so far-away so it’s always a treat to see intelligent life travelling across the universe to blow up buildings that I recognise. It’s much more fun than them acting out their violence in gleaming, distant worlds.  

*The War of the Worlds* reflected the fears of its time. It’s a story about a catastrophic, technologically-advanced war and was written barely sixteen years before the outbreak of WW1. And yet, wars keep on being waged, with increasingly sophisticated ways of killing, and *The War of the Worlds* just sits there, reflecting our senseless brutality right back at us.

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**Good Reads**

**Just Jack**
Kate Scott, Piccadilly Press, 9781848126244, £5.99

*Just Jack* is the story of a boy who has moved house a lot. He’s kind of given up on making friends and has developed a system to make it easy to start in new schools. This time there’s a problem, his system doesn’t seem to work with one of the children and Jack starts to think a friend might be a good thing.

I was in love with this book within the first few pages. Kate Scott is really funny. You get to know all of her characters really well. I loved going to Tyler’s house with Jack and seeing his zany inventions, and understanding him better. I would recommend this book to anyone who likes funny stories that make you think too. **Mia, Year 5**

**The Legend Of Podkin One-Ear**
Kieran Larwood, illus David Wyatt, Faber & Faber, 9780571340200, £6.99

This is a great book. A storyteller arrives on Bramblemas Eve and begins telling the young rabbits his story. He promises that the version he will tell will be the truth! Podkin, his older sister Paz, and younger brother, Pook, have to escape the safety of their burrow when the Gorm attack their home, and that’s the beginning of their adventure to defeat the enemy that is threatening rabbits across the Five Realms. Although at times, it is a sad tale, I liked it because of all the action and adventure. My favourite part was when the Gorm attacked Podkin’s warren. The illustrations help bring the characters and the world they live in to life, and the map at the start is great for seeing where they go on their journey. **Tomas, Year 3**

**Boy X**
Dan Smith, Chicken House, 9781909489042, £6.99

When Ash wakes up, he needs answers. He’s in a strange place that seems to be a hospital, but he can’t find any doctors or nurses. When he does find the front door he realises he’s a long way from home as the heat hits him and he stares out at the jungle ahead of him.

When Isabel arrives, she takes him to where her dad should be to discover their parents have been injected with a deadly virus and they’re running out of time to get the cure.

I loved this book so much! I don’t have a favourite part - it was all better than amazing! Ash is very brave and resourceful, and Isabel is courageous and smart. They make a great team! **Jasmine, Year 5**

**Knights And Bikes**
Gabrielle Kent, illus Rex Crowle, Knights Of, 9781999642503, £6.99

Demelza lives in her caravan on the peaceful island of Penfurzy. When a monster breaks in, she grabs her foam sword and prepares to defend her home and pet goat. It turns out the monster isn’t a monster, but a really cool girl called Nessa. The two become best friends and set off on their bikes to find the legendary fortune of the Penfurzy Knights hidden somewhere on the island. Knights And Bikes is great fun and full of adventure. My favourite character is Nessa; she always sticks by her friend Demelza however crazy her ideas are, and my favourite part is when Nessa gets bitten by a head! The illustrations are really funny too. There is also a clue hidden within the story for the reader to find which adds to the mystery. **Zoe, Year 5**

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The War of the Worlds (978-0141441030) is published by Penguin Classic, £6.99.

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I wish I’d written...
Virginia Lowe finds that a familiarity with picture books leads to children recognising different artistic styles.

Young children's preferences for artistic styles has been researched quite extensively, but the majority of studies have focused on their reactions to a single painting, or groups of three or four, never to picture books. Young children sort pictures as similar by subject not by style, though exposure to many paintings by the same artist could be training in recognising their style. This is exactly what exposure to picture books offers. The average book contains at least fifteen illustrations by the same artist, and this must influence children's ability to recognise style, especially when they are exposed to several books by the same illustrator. Cognitive psychologists do not expect children to recognise style until about seven. 'Trained' on picture books, they began commenting on style much younger.

In our house books were usually referred to by their titles. However we referred to some books generically by author/illustrator names. For instance, on rushed evenings we only had time for 'a quick Dick Bruna' and the children also used this term for the series of square brightly-coloured little books shelved together. The term was first used by the children at 2y11m (Rebecca, two years eleven months) and 3y3m (Nicholas).

One night Rebecca (3y9m) and her father John went to her bedroom to select books for the evening reading:

J: Time for a quick Dick Bruna.
R: You're Dick Bruna!
J: What does that make you? Miss Bruna? Or Rebecca Bruna?
R: No, I'm a girl. I'm going to put you on the shelf.'

Another generic term was 'Beatrix Potters', because her books were also identifiable by their uniform appearance and were shelved together. When she was asked what book she wanted, Rebecca, (2y6m), replied, 'I want two Be-ix Potter's. Nick, (3y3m) remarked, 'More Potter books' pointing to a pile of them on the floor. When Rebecca (3y10m) was trying to get me to remember a library book she had borrowed 'a long time ago', she described it as 'about a cat catching a mouse in a bag' and more details. Eventually I asked her about the colour of the cover. She replied 'it had a white cover. It was a Beatrix Potter!' Finally I recognised it as The Story of Miss Moppet. It had not occurred to me to ask her to name the author, as I would have done with an adult.

The first author name identified by Nick was to Richard Scarry's Best Word Book Ever, rather than to an identically bound series. At 2y5m he would ask for 'Dat big Scarry book', but by 2y11m, he had extended this to others by the illustrator: Unlike the Bruna and Potter series, the Scarrys Ralph knew were not uniform in size and shape, and were recognisable as a set only by their drawing style and because we included 'Richard Scarry' in the author statement each time.

When Nick was 3y4m, Rebecca brought home a sheet of busy-work from school with Scarry figures along the top – photocopied line sketches in black and white. Although this was quite out of context, Nick recognised them at once: 'That's Scarry! Lucy [his friend] has got that in a book'. By now the term was clearly being applied not just to the books, but to a drawing style, although it was still a perhaps a generic term for a kind of picture rather than the person who created them.

Rebecca at 2y9m provided the youngest unambiguous case of identifying character by style. Looking through Veronica's Smile by Roger Duvoisin, for the first time, she remarked on the endpapers, 'Janet read me a book about Jim one day'. Janet was a babysitter who had read her the book Round the Corner by Jean Showalter and Roger Duvoisin once, three months before.) Duvoisin illustrated both books, and the boy in Veronica does resemble Jim. From age 2y10m onwards, Rebecca always recognised Shirley Hughes' pictures saying that they looked like Lucy in Lucy and Tom's Day. Other books in which characters were recognised as similar were illustrated by Brian Wildsmith, Clare Newberry, and Margaret Graham. In all of these cases the other book was not visible. Commonly the response was a spontaneous comparison on the child's part, though occasionally we drew their attention to similarities. The children soon mimicked this prompting:

N (4y3m): What does that remind you of?
J: I don't know.
N: The grandfather who pulled up the turnip! comparing Oxenbury's illustrations in The Hunting of the Snark with hers in The Great Big Enormous Turnip. He had not seen the latter for five months.

But it was not only characters they recognised. The children picked up other clues to the artist's style

N: These have got the same noses (two books by Loup in contrast to one by Mordillo at 4y2m).
R: I know who this is by. It's the Millions of Cats person, because it's got the same clouds (Three Gay Tales from Grimm at 4y11m both by Wanda Gag).

Children's books mentioned

The Hunting of the Snark, Lewis Carol, illus Helen Oxenbury
Veronica's Smile, Roger Duvoisin
Millions of Cats, Wanda Gag
Three Gay Tales from Grimm, Wanda Gag
Lucy and Tom's Day, Shirley Hughes
The Architect, Jean-Jacques Loup
Patatrac, Jean-Jacques Loup
Crazy Cowboy, Guillermo Mordillo
The Story of Miss Moppet, Beatrix Potter
Best Word Book Ever, Richard Scarry
Round the Corner, Jean Showalter, illus Roger Duvoisin
The Great Big Enormous Turnip, Alexei Tolstoy, illus Helen Oxenbury

Dr Virginia Lowe lives in Melbourne, Australia, and is a literature adjunct associate at Monash University. She is the proprietor of Create a Kids' Book assessment agency. Her book Stories, Pictures and Reality: Two Children Tell (Routledge 2007) is based on the records of reading to her children. Lines Between John and Virginia Lowe a poetry chapbook has just been published.

From Lucy & Tom
From One To Ten, Shirley Hughes (Red Fox 2018) originally published as Lucy & Tom's 123 by Victor Gollancz
Happy Anniversary to The Blue Balloon

For 30 years Mick Inkpen’s The Blue Balloon has been delighting small children and their grown-ups with its magical story of a boy who finds a balloon and discovers it has ‘Strange and Wonderful Powers’. The extraordinary balloon grows and expands, morphs and stretches. It flies into space and beyond the boundaries of the book into giant and concertina pages. Thirty years ago it also flew into the hearts of readers, securing Inkpen’s reputation as a creator of much-loved characters. Mick spoke to Michelle Pauli about creating a classic.

In the foreword to the new anniversary edition of The Blue Balloon, Mick Inkpen reveals that the book’s publication marked the first time that he ‘began to feel like a proper children’s author’. It was only his second solo picture book following a long period as a graphic designer, devising Gordon Fraser greetings cards, illustrating magazines and working on many joint projects with fellow author/illustrator Nick Butterworth. As a designer he was used to working to a brief and decided to create his own for his follow-up project for Hodder.

‘I wanted a universal subject, one that both children and adults could relate to, and balloons are cheap, celebratory things with character – they can be farty or squeaky or floaty. I simply made a list of the attributes of a balloon and while I was making that list it occurred to me that there was no reason why my balloon shouldn’t have “strange and wonderful powers”.

Both the balloon and the book took off. Whereas Inkpen had previously felt ‘slightly fraudulent’ claiming to be an author, that all changed when he started to see piles of The Blue Balloon on bookshop counters. ‘It was a tremendous boost of encouragement that affirmed what I had dared to suspect – that I was capable of making picture books that children would want to read,’ he says. ‘It was probably the most exciting moment in my career. From that year on I did think of myself as a bona fide children’s author.’

The confidence boost helped Inkpen to feel more comfortable trusting his instincts about storytelling and language. He’d had doubts about including the word “indestructible” in The Blue Balloon – was it too long, too difficult? He decided that including one or two such words would probably be ok and felt vindicated when, a couple of years later, a friend told him that his toddler, having been read The Blue Balloon, was now in the habit of marching around the house declaring that he was ‘indestructible’. The book also set Inkpen on a course of breaking conventions when he decided that his balloon should not be constrained by mere paper:

‘Hence the giant pages and concertina folds which allowed it to stretch and expand beyond the edges of the page – and led in turn to the dramatic irony of the end of the story, where it is the reader, not the boy narrator and owner of the balloon, who knows that the balloon is changing into rainbow colours as the page opens out,’ he says.

This also feeds into the playfulness that Inkpen believes to be so crucial in children’s books – and in life – and that he has enjoyed throughout his work, playing with the conventions and structures of the picture book. Take the meta-humour of a Kipper book where Kipper himself wonders on the first page of a picture book what kind of book it will turn out to be, or Bear, where a bear cub falls out of the sky into the book and the reader must decide, at the end, if he can be kept, or This Is My Book, in which the naughty Snapdragon eats parts of the letters in the text and delights in changing their meaning, turning “this is my book” into “this is my poo”.

Of course, The Blue Balloon is now celebrated as the book that introduced Inkpen’s classic character Kipper to the world, although he was still on four legs and playing a supporting role as the little boy’s pet dog at the time. However, it wasn’t long before he was the star of the show. Hodder asked Inkpen for a follow-up to The Blue Balloon and he decided to tackle it strategically, aware that publishers seek repeat success and that what repeats best is character. Having decided to create a character that could appear large on every page and would spawn a series of books, Mick’s wife Debbie suggested he take the dog from The Blue Balloon and give him his own book.

‘Weirdly it meant that I didn’t love Kipper as much for the first two or three years as I would have done had he been a more spontaneous creation,’ reveals Mick. ‘But I came to love him a lot. I then began to apply some of that playful creativity to the Kipper books so I did come to enjoy doing the Kipper books but it was a very different kind of birth, the first Kipper.’

Many more Kipper books followed, along with a series of animated films which totalled 78 episodes and was ‘a great experience – but not one I would swap for the luxury of control in making picture books’. Now enjoying semi-retirement, Inkpen works with his daughter Chloë Inkpen, an acclaimed illustrator in her own right. Together they have created the Zoe and Beans series, the truly wonderful I Will Love You Anyway and Fred books about a naughty dog who cannot help but run away, and, most recently, Mrs Blackhat, a most contemporary witch.
Celebrate with this special anniversary edition of the classic picture book, featuring fold-out pages and lift-up flaps that little ones will love.

Happy birthday, Kipper!

Cuddle up with more Kipper stories!

Inkpen’s partnership with his daughter has freed him up to focus on the words rather than the pictures in their collaborations, something he now views with relief.

“I’m not one of those illustrators who has pens and pencils in his top pocket and will always draw on napkins, so it’s always been the creation of the book that’s been the most exciting thing,” he says. “When I know in my head that there’s a beginning, a middle and an end, when there’s a shape, I kind of almost resent that I’ve got to illustrate it. It’s never been an itch that I’ve got to scratch.”

To be able to work with Chloe is ‘just brilliant,’ he concludes, happily. “We have the same sensibility, we complete each other’s sentences and we can barely remember who created what: we don’t have a sense of being possessive about what we’ve created – it may not work if we didn’t share the same genes!”

© Mick Inkpen, 2004

Michelle Pauli is a freelance writer and editor specialising in books and education. She created and edited the Guardian children’s books site.
Bear Moves


That purple Bear is back. But now he is wearing a whole variety of costumes as he shows off his dancing moves whether hip-hop, street, the Twist – even a Belly Dance. Bunny a Squirrel try to keep up, managing the music, reluctant partners in Bear’s enthusiasm. But Bear wants to Tango; he needs a partner to help him in size and vigour – and there she is. Perfect. But can Bear match up to her?

The action bursts off the page. Here text and image combine to create an infectious invitation designed to get a young audience moving and grooving. Bailey-Smith is a rapper poet himself and the rhythms and rhyme and rhytm that demands to be spoken aloud, Sav Akyüs rises to the challenge, creating vibrant images using bold outlin, a style, saturated yet simple colours that bring the text to life. Bear is indeed a larger than life character and this partnership ensures that he is unforgettable. This is the book as a real entertainment, to be enjoyed by lively young and inhibited adults. FH

Maisie’s Scrapbook


Maisie’s Scrapbook presents a year in five-year-old Maisie’s life at the centre of a loving, multiracial family. From the endpapers, with their child-centre of a loving, multiracial family. From the endpapers, with their child-

The mixed media illustrations portray the move through the seasons beautifully and use colour, texture and shade to skillfully contrast the bright family scenes with the dark, swirling backgrounds of Dada’s folklore tales. From the endpapers, with their child-like family drawings and lettering through double page spreads which show the changing seasons, this book lives the real: a child’s-eye view of her own world. Dada tells her African tales of Anansi the spider and lets her spirit and imagination soar and calm Mama is her source of steady comfort when she is frightened or upset. Maisie’s parents may have different coloured skin, different words for the same things, they may match their food, wear different clothes and play different musical instruments but they praise her just the same, nag her just the same and love her in the same way.

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**The Kiss**


This beautiful hardback book tells the delightful, thoughtful journey of a kiss. Grandma leaves her grandchildren’s house and her grandchild, Edwyn, blows her a kiss as she is walking away. She catches the kiss and puts it in her pocket for safe keeping. The kiss takes the form of a little creature who maintains its safe keeping. The kiss takes the form of a picture of a women ‘shouting horrid things at her little girl.’ It’s quite shocking as a scene as the emotions depicted are very clear. What a powerful way to show emotions though and the effect on each of us....that’s why I like the book. It’s a simply a lovely story – told well and illustrated beautifully. Snap it up for the spring and it will be a joy all year round. SG

**All the Ways to Be Smart**

Davina Bell, ill. Alison Colpoy, Scribe, 32pp, 978 1 511617 55 6, £11.99 hbk

This picture book from Australia has glowing colours that seem to leap off the page and rhyme text that children will very much enjoy chanting. The theme is that everyone is smart in their own way and that, ‘Smart is not just being best at spelling bees, a tricky test. Or knowing all the answers ever...other things are just as clever.’ The children in the story try all sorts of imaginative and fun things like playing witches or pirates, drawing ‘things with claws’, making boats out of boxes, helping people when they are sad or shy, playing the ukulele, playing space ships, etc. etc. in fact, there are so many choices of things that people can be good at that any child will find something (or several things) in these pages that he or she does well. My only slight caveat is that someone might think they had to be good at all the things mentioned, and that is certainly not the case. The book is a jumbly rumble of busy, bright colours and kids doing fun things – along with dinosaurs, birds and flowers and all kinds of creatures. It will appeal and help children who feel less than academically inclined to realise their own potential and do their best with their own talents and abilities. ES

**Rosie is my Best Friend**

Ali Pye, Simon & Schuster, 32pp, 978 1 4711 7250 2, £6.99 pbk

Rosie and her best friend have a very special relationship. They are inseparable, spending every day together and having lots of fun. The story focuses on one particularly enjoyable and very busy day. Creeping up early to play before everyone is up, they have exciting imaginary adventures as deep-sea divers or space explorers, learn new tricks, ‘helping’ with chores, meeting friends and facing dangers in the park and finally curling up contentedly together at the end of a busy day. Ostensibly a simple account of every day adventures but look out for the clever twist on the final spread challenging our expectations about Rosie and her best friend. Readers are likely to want to go back to the beginning and read the book again.

The illustrations are delightful, with striking use of colour and lots of detail and humour, for example showing exactly how unhelpful the enthusiastic friends’ attempts at helping actually are. This is a joyful exuberant picture book about friendship between a human and an animal which adults and children will enjoy sharing and returning to. SMc
animals who need some kind of help, and they are able to provide that help. Little Rabbit is even able to add an idea of her own in helping Squirrel with his family responsibilities. This is not a picture book as such, as it is small like a chapter book, but each page looks like a picture book with a lot of illustration and usually not much text, though a few pages contain two short paragraphs. It’s quite a long story, and a picture book as such, as it is small.

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The illustrations do not merely illustrate the text; they effectively emphasise the arc of Alemagna’s tale – not just a story about a party but a story about changing family relationships, about learning to enjoy life even as an adult. As Harold is right, this is the Best Disaster Ever and one to be shared, especially by parents and children. FH

**Wishing for a Dragon**

Becky Cameron, Hodder Children’s Books, 32pp, 978 1 444 93623 0, £6.99 pbk

The cover gives lots of clues of the plot within; its night sky twinkles with silvery stars and three small children ride on a huge winged creature. Down below graze four-legged beasts, both sporting single horns. Three small children should be ready for bed, but all three are wide awake and ready for adventure. ‘Where shall we go? And what shall we see?’ says one wag; another, treasured wish is to see a dragon. ‘Hop in,’ shouts Eliza, as a hot air balloon floats to their window. Wishes come true...a search amongst the trees for gold and a carriage, and a journey, from a tiger in the jungle. Eventually the balloon crashes tipping them into a magical land full of the strangest creatures. Readers will search for all the tiny pixies in the detailed pictures. As dark falls, the three children gaze in wonder at the star-filled sky, three special constellations picked out; a treasure chest, a tiger... and a dragon. Over swoops a huge shape. It is Eliza’s dream dragon! Exciting, latest of adventures each has enjoyed, the children become sleepy, realising their balloon has crashed so their homework journey a present to their parents, and they are safely delivered home. There are lots of details to be found in the pictures which enhance the mystery of the tale, lots of ideas to spark off imaginative talk about dreams and their fulfilment. Having read the story and returned to the title page, we see the three children going upstairs. Barney carrying a skull and cross bones flag, Olive picking up their pet cat,.... and Bella clutching her cuddly toy. Possibly some inspiration for all their dream adventures. The repetition of the questions, ‘Where shall we go? And what shall we see?’ makes for good participation for the youngest of children, whilst the keenest of picture spotters will see that the balloon has kept the patchwork fabric, a stitched emblem on Sophie’s bed! This story bears frequent reading to glean all the touches woven into it, both in the text and in the charming illustrations. GB

**The Disaster Department Store**

Lily Murray, ill. Richard Merritt, Buster Books, 32pp, 9781780555966, £6.99 pbk

Eliza Jane wishes for a prehistoric set for her 4th birthday as she is described as a ‘wilful child’ (and drawn as too one) her parents decide it would be better to give her wants she wants for her birthday despite them looking a little alarmed; ‘Her parents weren’t keen, it has to be said, They wished she had asked for a rabbit instead.’

Handily Eliza Jane’s mum knows just where to go so the family visit the only dinosaur department store they know. When they get there they meet a rather sinister looking dinosaur store owner who lets them look around. The ending is rather sweet and heartening as Eliza Jane does something kind for all the dinosaurs she meets.

Eliza Jane has a lovely one to read together or in a class and then would be fabulous to start a discussion about your own dinosaur department store: it’s rather refreshing to have a girl who likes dinosaurs and also to think about a store with them all packed in there. The rhyme is great to read aloud and the language is snappy with many recognisable words for children themselves to decode. Onomatopoeia and alliteration in bold and capital letters help with the reading out loud too.

Richard Merritt’s illustrations are gloriously colourful and bold. There is relief especially when meeting the dinosaurs themselves and their quirky features especially one who likes hot dogs...the little sausage dog features in a few more pages after that if you look closely too.

As with many picture books this one is multi layered for different ages. You can tell it’s likely Eliza Jane will get her own way through the language and also the illustrations. The book is lots of fun for all ages including grown-ups too. SG

**Two Sides**

Polly Ho-Yen, ill. Binny Talib, Stripes Publishing, 96pp, 978 1 78895 062 6, £7.99, hbk

Lula and Lenka have known each other all their lives. They are very different. Lula is super tidy and quiet. Lula likes dogs and Lenka prefers cats. However this isn’t a problem for them, in fact it helps them understand that people have different points of view. They do everything together until that is ‘The Day That Everything Goes Wrong.’ This is when a minor disagreement leads to a major falling out and they are no longer friends. However both feel very alone. Is this really the end of their friendship? Perhaps helping to solve a dispute between two other girls might help?

This is a story about the value of bonds between two very individuals with different perspectives on life. It exploration of the potential fragility of friendship and the impact its ups and downs can have on wellbeing; themes many young readers will relate to.

Told from the perspective of both of the friends with a different font indicating a change of narrator, this book has a fresh layout and stylish full colour illustrations. This title is part of a new series designed for newly independent readers from Stripes Publishing an imprint of Little Tiger Group. SMc

**Hello Lighthouse**

Sophie Blackall, Orchard Books, 9781408357163, 48pp, £12.99 hbk

Hello...hello...hello! The light from the lighthouse shines across the sea, greeting ships and sailors.

Making sure all know it is there. But a lighthouse needs to be looked after. Who does that? What would life be like in a lighthouse? In summer it could be nice; what about winter or when it is foggy? In this picture book by American illustrator, Sophie Blackall, we are introduced to the life of the lighthouse keeper aimed at a young readership. Here are no technical details; the setting is domestic and we watch the keeper going about his tasks through round porthole-like windows on the page. The cover is made up of the patchwork fabric, whose spotters will see that the balloon body is described as a ‘wilful child’ (and drawn as too one) her parents decide it would be better to give her wants she wants for her birthday despite them looking a little alarmed; ‘Her parents weren’t keen, it has to be said, They wished she had asked for a rabbit instead.’

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**Genius**

Morag Hood, ill. Ella Okstad, Simon and Schuster, 978 4 7711 4565 0, £6.99, pbk

Sophie Johnson Detective Genius is an enjoyable introduction to a lighthouse that could be just that, a picture book opening the door to this world, raising a question or two but no more. Moreover the author, Stripes Publishing includes an afterword expanding the text, adding further facts and amusing anecdotes which add a bit more substance to the whole and extending its potential. FH

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the detective has a crime to solve. Someone has stolen Lion’s tail. (One of many toys partaking in Sophie’s imaginative detective story.) She has a new assistant, Bella, (pet dog) but Sophie considers Bella has not absorbed any knowledge of detecting from her vast library of books on the subject. On her shelves we spot The Art of Investigating, Hidden Secrets, Famous Spies, and Sherlock Bones. These books have obviously been well read by Sophie! Meantime Bella does her best to tell Sophie that a couple of real burglars are sneaking past the window, swag bags aloft.

Readers need to search the pictures to discover that Sophie has not only eventually found that missing tail, but has also captured the culprit. Poor ignored Bella gives up trying to attract Sophie’s attention, and sets about creating elaborate traps to catch the real criminals. There is no text to explain any of these happenings, so reading the pictures is vital, and this telling is skilfully executed by the illustrator, Sophie, Detective Genius, solves the case. Rabbit is the guilty party and is dragged off by Sophie to her police station. But it is Bella who receives the police recommendation, a VERY GOOD DOG medal, whilst we see three burglars locked up in the police van. A fun book for would-be detectives and their like. GB

Think Big!

Kes Gray, illus Nathan Reed, Hodder Children’s Books, 32pp, 978 1 444 94212 5, £6.99 hbk

‘Believe and you can achieve’ says the front cover, as Humphy Dumpty sits upon his wall, grinning confidently. A wonderful partnership between the author and illustrator is on display here in this highly humourous book. The story line itself is novel, and the illustrations go far beyond the text to make a richly portrayed tale which is surely bound for great success. All children familiar with nursery rhyme characters will love spotting each one in the pictures, each character taking turns to advise Humphy, until the Piper’s son starts the ball rolling by asking Humphy what he wants to be when he leaves school. Humphy promptly replies, ‘A boiled egg.’ His numerous friends, sitting atop the wall on either side of him, are horrified at this response and quickly pull their ears back. Humphy lives in a house with no address. A footballer? A musician? The policemen, a doctor, a firefighter…. until the Dish who ran away with the Spoon aptly announces, ‘If you truly believe in yourself and you work really hard, then you can be absolutely anything in the world that you want to be!’  ‘THINK BIG!’ says the Giant from the top of the beanstalk. ‘Aim for the stars!’ says the cow who jumped over the moon. Convinced, Humphy declares his friends are absolutely right. He will work hard at school, get a job in a space agency, start at the bottom and work his way up and up and up, and become the best astronaut in the whole wide world, no the whole wide universe! ‘Good for you,’ cheers Jack as Nimble, giving Humphy a Big pat on the back… Oh what a delicious ending is then made by Kes Gray! What do you imagine happens next, to end the tale? Readers will immediately want to turn back to the beginning and read the book again, identifying each and every character from traditional tales and rhymes in the brilliant illustrations. This book is great for encouraging positive thinking and for building self-confidence. There are lots of opportunities for youngsters to participate, in speaking, drama, art work and to spark imaginative writing… and reading, again and again! A winner, go find it! GB

The Midnight Hour

Benjamin Read & Laura Trinder, Chicken House, 275pp, 9781911149006, £6.99 pbk

Emily and her Mum, both feisty, loud and volatile, have had a big row on the night that Mum receives a mysterious letter and disappears into the darkness to solve a family crisis. When Emily’s quiet, seemingly boring Dad goes to find her and fails to return, Emily decides to set off in search of her vanished parents. Following her Mum’s advice to “never knowingly be under-snacked”, Emily packs sandwiches and a hedgehog companion and heads off into the world of the Midnight Hour.

This turns out to be a sort of Victorian London frozen in time by the chimes of Big Ben, run by magic and peopled by the Night Folk, an assortment of monsters and creatures from myths and legends. Here, Emily meets her Mum is a secret agent librarian, her Dad works for the heroic Night Post, and her Mum is a secret agent librarian, her Dad works for the heroic Night Post in charge of dangerous deliveries and that she herself is a shape-changing Nocturne who plans to use the deadly Nocturne who plans to use the deadly Night Folk, an assortment of creepy, and volatile, have had a big row on the night that Mum receives a mysterious letter and disappears into the darkness to solve a family crisis. When Emily’s quiet, seemingly boring Dad goes to find her and fails to return, Emily decides to set off in search of her vanished parents. Following her Mum’s advice to “never knowingly be under-snacked”, Emily packs sandwiches and a hedgehog companion and heads off into the world of the Midnight Hour.

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New Talent

Little Badman and the Invasion of the Killer Aunties

Humza Arshad and Henry White,illus Aleksei Bitskoff, Puffin, 9780141381008, £6.99 pbk

Humza Khan is a 12-year-old ninja-rapper-gangster with huge plans for his future. Unfortunately, he also suffers from debilitating stage fright and has the ‘greatest cricket coach Pakistan has ever known’ for a father, which means that his opportunities for world domination are rather limited. When not laying down rap tracks and losing vital cricket matches for their school team, Humza and his friends, Umer and Wendy, begin to notice that the teachers from their school are slowly disappearing. Even more worrying, they are being replaced by sinister aunties from the local Asian community, whose only objective seems to be to regularly feed the pupils a wide variety of sugary snacks. Clearly, things are starting to go wrong as it seems, but what can Humza do when nobody will take him seriously, either as a rapper or as a detective?

Best known for his first collaboration between Humza Arshad and Henry White was an absolute delight to read, and I genuinely loved it. Even though it may be their first foray into children’s fiction, the writers’ background in the centre of a good story, and characters but, crucially, never forgets that an entertaining and lively writing, contemporary setting for its exciting story and, just as humorous illustrations is fully justified and should prove to be an entertaining read for children that builds upon the energy of the earlier chapters and seems (almost) believable.

Little Badman reminded me of the My Brother is a Superhero series by David Solomon, with its lively writing, contemporary setting, and plots featuring ludicrously over-complicated plans for world domination. Children will love for its exciting story and, just as importantly, it’s another book that will reach out to an audience who may not always be at the centre of events, and not the characters’ ethnicity or religious background. The main characters are vibrant and easy to empathise with, and the ever-changing relationship dynamics between them will be familiar to all children. There were several times when I laughed out loud at Humza’s frustrations with his family and friends, as well as at the references to rappers such as Tupac. The plot inevitably veers into the realms of science-fiction in the second half of the book, but it’s done in a way that builds upon the energy of the earlier chapters and seems (almost) believable.

When a young baby was left at the entrance to an orphanage there was no clue as to where she came from; unless you consider that there was snow on her blanket and yet there was none in the area. She grows up she becomes fascinated by science and is allowed to have a small lab at the orphanage (Ackerbee’s), life is good. The baby girl is whisked away by a stranger, purporting to be her guardian and life begins to be less certain. This is accompanied by her pet tarantula Violet and by a device that was found with her as a baby; it has strange star shaped inscriptions, but what is it for? Tessa finds out when the device allows her to communicate with a boy in a parallel world and they discover a conspiracy to take over one of the worlds. How can they prevent the destruction of a peaceful world and what is the relationship between Tessa and Thomas?

This is a magical tale of two versions of our world and how the misuse of scientific knowledge can lead to disaster and chaos. The story itself is about friendship, family in its broadest sense and how science can be used for both good and bad. The author has created these two parallel worlds, both of which see the action taking place in their version of Dublin. There is a real sense that we know these worlds, yet they are just different enough to make us wonder about alternative possibilities. The characters are well formed and there are some great villains in the form of Norton Cleat and the housekeeper Mrs Thistleton, so that you really long for them to get their comeuppance. One of the best scenes is to see an orphanage that is shown in a positive light, rather than being the stuff of nightmares. This is Sinead O’Halloran’s second children’s book and she has produced something that is even better than the first. This is an absolute gem and hopefully will find its way onto many a Christmas list for lovers of the fantastic. MP

Call Me Alastair

Cory Leonardi, Scholastic, 320pp, 9781407186719, £6.99 pbk

Cory Leonardi reveals in her ‘Acknowledgements’ that “This book was a winding eight-year, soul-searching journey. A crazy dream”; and, yes, at times it reads like that. There’s a meandering, even whimsical, plot; but clearly incidents move things on, sometimes they don’t. If you settle on an African grey parrot called Alastair as your principal narrator, then who knows what sort of plot you’ll end up with? Especially if, from the moment his egg cracks, the bird has the ability to think and speak fluently as he tells his own story (and we’re not talking ‘parrotting’ here).

In addition to using a young parrot as her mouthpiece, Leonardi imposes further constraints upon herself in this debut novel. We’re almost halfway through the book before the scene shifts from the back room of Pete’s Pet (and Parrot!) Shack. That’s not a setting likely to generate too much dynamic action, and it doesn’t. Instead, there’s a great deal of dialogue in a consistently comic American idiom, since Pete’s store is indeed somewhere in the United States. The conversations mostly involve Alastair, his much-loved sister Aggie and a guinea-pig called Porky. Occasionally Pete and his young part-time helper Fritz chip in, along with a rabbit named Babs, some puppies and a background chorus of gerbils and infant rabbits. At this stage, the goldfish say nothing.

Things open out considerably when, to his delight, Fritz gets together enough dollars to buy Aggie and take her home. Soon after, Alastair is bought by Mrs Albertina Poppy, an elderly but sparky widow, still writing to loving letters to her late husband, Everett (her correspondence provides another lovely narrative voice). We also get to read what Fritz calls his Medical Logbook, and his medical skills mean he can be a doctor one day, and keeps a record of his own health along with insights into the conditions of people he meets.

Alastair’s a cross sort of critic, irritably plucking out his own feathers to the point where he resembles a naked turkey. His consuming psychological drive is to care for his sister. Time and again, he devises...
an amusing passage, for example, a cast inevitably drifts into. There's might relish the curious byways such quirky characters. Older readers pages to see how things turn out for children will race through the 300+ ambitious. Perhaps able younger a reading age, which may seem those needs will be happily met. course, we know that in the end, wishing for what they haven't. Of what they already have and to stop metaphoric cages, to see clearly to break free from their literal and miss loved ones, and now they need engaging, all unwittingly amusing. All Wallace Stevens. Carroll to Herman Melville by way of absorbing work ranging from Lewis Damaged Norton Anthology, thus and inwardly digested an old water-pastiches. He once shredded, chewed in his escape strategies include being unable to fly and having no clue where Florida is. However, one of Alastair's unable to fly and having no clue where dammed Norton Anthology, thus one of Alastair's implacable enemy, a foul-words in the text, despite the sneers tempered cat named Tiger. Readers who take this rambling trip as it comes, enjoying the views and in no hurry to get to the destination, will find an original, entertaining, sometimes uneven read. Leonardo's next novel could well be worth looking out for; with luck, it won't be eight years in the making. GF

The Princess who hid in a Tree

Jackie Holderness, ill. Alan Marks, Bodleian Library, 32pp, 9781851245185, £12.99, hbk
Based on legend and set in Oxford, this book tells the story of Saint Frideswide, daughter of a Saxon King and Queen. Adventurous and brave as a child she grew up to be kind, gentle and talented. When news reached nearby kingdoms of her beauty and kindness kings and princes sought her hand in marriage. But Frideswide did not want to marry, she had plans to found a church instead. However one suitor was persistent declaring he would attack Oxford and kidnap Frideswide if she resisted. There follows an adventure in which the princess and her friends escape her pursuers by boat, sheltering with animals in a barn and hiding in a tree. An ability to perform miracles emerges when Frideswide's prayers and songs produce a much-needed stream of fresh water; later apparent again when she returns to Oxford to face her would be captor. This is an interesting account of a little-known story with a strong female protagonist. The illustrations, traditional in style, attractively complement the text. For those wishing to find out more about this story the back of the book includes additional information on its historical background. SMc

Potkin and Stubbbs

Sophie Green, ill. K.J. Mountford, Piccadilly, 275pp, 9781848127616, £6.99, pbk
The heroine of this story, Lil Potkin, is a not very ordinary girl who lives with her mother in the city of Peligan; a place that seems dark and full of danger. Her mother works at the town hall for the Mayor and is never home, thus giving Li plenty of time to indulge in her passion of being a detective. When she accidentally comes across the ghost of Ned Stubbbs he asks for help in finding out what happened to him. Before long they are caught up in an old series of crimes, and then when these seem linked to Ned's death they enlist the support of the private detective who had dealt with the original investigation. The trouble is that the more they delve into the past, the more dangerous life seems to become; can they solve the mysteries before the villains catch up with them? This is a great crime adventure for middle grade readers and has a definite feel of American 'gumshoe' type stories. The author has created a dismal and at times sleazy city, where the Mayor totally controls the press and the police as well as the local government. Lil is a particularly feisty character and is not afraid of anything, although she does have a habit of jumping in to situations and Ned makes an unusual and worthy sidekick. The washed up detective Abe Mandrel acts as a link between the current action and the events of the past and we see him gradually climb out of the despair that he
had been in after failing to have the villains convicted in the past. The villains are as nasty as you could wish for and there are some excellent twists and turns in the plot, so that the audience is kept guessing throughout the book. I look forward to any further adventures of this intriguing pair; after all being a ghost can be quite useful for an investigator. MP

The Steam Whistle Theatre Company

Vivian French, Walker, 304pp, 978-1406376531, £16.99 pbk

A standing ovation for Vivian French whose new adventure has all the elements of the best dramas, i.e. intrepid heroes and unscrupulous villains, lively scenes, a profusion of hopes, dreams and well-laid plans going awry. It opens in London where the Pringle Players, a family theatre-troupe, are facing shrinking audiences and hard times. Almost before you can say curtain up however, Pa Pringle has had a flash of inspiration and the family, including youngsters Charlie and Rosie, are travelling north to the provinces and audiences who have yet to experience the delights of Pa’s Lear. Newly arrived in the unsuspecting town of Uncaster they encounter rival theatricals escaping from the Clapham Circus. Bubbles and his manager mother, who have had the same thought and have even more pressing reasons for escaping the capital. The Pringles find digs with the aristocratic Lady Poskett, also down on her uppers, and in spite of the best efforts of their rivals and thanks mostly to the determination and ingenuity of housemaid Edie their show goes and is declared a triumph. French is a gifted storyteller and this is a delight from start to finish, action-packed, hugely entertaining. Set in the late 1800s there’s a real sense of the times too and she vividly conjures up the camaraderie of the theatre. MMA

When We Were Warriors

Emma Carroll, Faber & Faber, 248pp, 9780571155047, £16.99 pbk

Emma Carroll is fast establishing herself as one of the most consistent and accessible authors writing for young readers. Taking historical backgrounds she makes them immediate and appealing. Her books have varied and intriguing themes ranging from a ghost story, her first Frost Hollow Hall to the excavation of Tutankhamen, a circus to WWII. Here we are back with that World War II, a setting which with that World War II, a setting which featured in Letters from a Lighthouse. Indeed young fans will be delighted to meet characters they can recognise from there. However, When We Were Warriors is not a single novel. Rather it is a linked series of three novellas. There are three protagonists to enjoy, three situations in which to become involved – but Carroll skilfully links all three in a way which provides a satisfying read. This is not just through the setting – the south-west coast of England facing the potential threat of invasion and enduring bombing raids, but also through characters, not least, Eddie the GI stationed in the area; a clever device. The situations are domestic, requiring believable involvement and action on the part of the young people. Carroll’s writing style is easy and contemporary without being anachronistic, attitudes are faithfully represented and there are many details that will both surprise and inform. Though many young readers will easily finish this book perhaps in one sitting, for others the organising into three separate stories will provide an added attraction. FH

Asha and the Spirit Bird

Jashinder Bilan, Chicken House, 288pp, 9 781911 490197, £6.99, pbk

This debut novel was the winner of the 2017 Times/Chicken House children’s fiction competition. It’s uneven fare for top school children that offers an attractive mix of social realism and cultural fantasy and is set in the northern Punjab, close to the border of Pakistan. It introduces aspects of everyday life – the caste system, the temple at the source of the Ganges, where the author’s own family has its Indian roots. Young Asha, facing the possibility of losing her village home, sets off to find her father in the distant city where he has gone to work in a textile factory. She has only a month until the debt collector returns for the final time and on the journey with her friend Jeevan, she faces setbacks and dangers that she overcomes with courage and ingenuity, and with the help of the spirit of her maternal grandmother, Nanjiee, in the form of a lamagaia, or bearded vulture. For readers unfamiliar with the story’s setting, it introduces aspects of everyday life in the Punjab, including a glossary of Hindi and Punjabi words, and also cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices, including the reverence for ancestors and a pilgrimage to the temple at the source of the Ganges. Animals play a large role in the book through characters, not least, Eddie the GI stationed in the area; a clever device. The situations are domestic, requiring believable involvement and action on the part of the young people. Carroll’s writing style is easy and contemporary without being anachronistic, attitudes are faithfully represented and there are many details that will both surprise and inform. Though many young readers will easily finish this book perhaps in one sitting, for others the organising into three separate stories will provide an added attraction. FH

The Dog Who Saved the World


Ross Welford’s new novel, his fourth, returns to favourite themes: time, time travel, family. The Dog Who Saved the World combines a fantastical plot, relying on an ingenious manipulation of the laws of quantum physics, with a traditional and warm-hearted adventure full of friendship, growing understanding, and family love. Georgie lives in Whitley Bay with her dad, brother Clem and dad’s girlfriend, Jessica. Mum died some years earlier. Georgie is unconvinced about Jessica’s role in their lives, and it’s unfortunate that her allergy to dogs means that Georgie’s beloved mongrel Mister Mash has to live in a nearby dog’s home. It’s while walking Mr Mash on the beach with her best friend Ramey Rahman that Georgie meets Dr Emilia Pretorius and all their lives – indeed the future of the whole world – changes forever. As scientists go, Dr Pretorius is firmly in the crazy/crazy haired tradition of Doc Brown – an eccentric genius with a somewhat cavalier attitude to the personal safety of others. She’s built an extraordinary VR machine which has the ability to transport people into the probable future and just needs some willing assistants to help her try it out. The plot allows for lots of very funny moments, as well as some that are really quite frightening, and the tension builds when a terrible disease breaks out, one that is spread by dogs and deadly to humans. The ability to time travel into the future suddenly becomes more than a game. Welford controls his plots with real skill and there are moments of high drama, comedy and tragedy as, with the help of Mister Mash, Georgie sets out to save the world. He’s confident enough to allow Georgie to meet a version of her future self, and to learn from a conversation the two of them have. Genuine emotions are always at the centre of the action, however wild it gets, and no matter what is going on around them, we trust his characters who are as warm and realistic as they come. AR

Noor or Never-a Dunkirk Story

Bali Rai, 978-1-4071911-96-2, Scholastic, 203pp, £6.99 pbk

This absorbing and revealing book is part of the Voices series, published to give a platform to those unsung heroes from the past whose authentic stories have not been fully told. Now or Never explains the role of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps, sixteen hundred men who, in the Second World War, with mules and trained mulateurs supplied food and equipment to British troops across France. Although their role in the war has been acknowledged in some prestigious quarters—for example, the Imperial War Museum—the media has not been widely used to acknowledge the vital role these men and their animals played.

Fifteen year old Fazal Khan is proud to follow in his grandfather’s footsteps and support the British Army in his role as mulateur but his enthusiasm and naivete are gradually worn away as the war progresses and the advancing German troops eventually force the British into retreat to Dunkirk. The
Indian soldiers encountered a degree of prejudice and hostility from their British counterparts and, in addition, during the retreat, had to abandon their beloved munitions as they could no longer be fed. Fazal tried to stay loyal to the British but his close friend Mustafa repeatedly reminds him that the war is not their war, Britain not their country and many British soldiers do not regard the Indian troops as their equals.

Nowhere is this more apparent than on the beaches at Dunkirk, when, amidst the wholesale slaughter of their comrades and as their erstwhile rescuers come the order from High Command that all non-white troops should be left behind in the rescue operation. One officer, Captain John Ashdown, father of the politician Paddy Ashdown, refused to obey this order, stating that it would be morally wrong to leave the Indian troops behind. He remained true to his principles and saw to it that as many men as possible from every creed were saved. He was rewarded for his efforts with a court martial, which resulted in him being stripped of his rank and his career ended.

This simply written and moving book, written with a sure touch to Captain John Ashdown, father of the prisoner Fazal, he believed in duty and, like Fazal, he saw that the men who had served under were too often flayed leaders. VR

**Ghost**

Jason Reynolds, Knights of, 224pp, 978 1 999642 5 2, £6.99

Following the UK publication of his remarkable verse novel, *A Long Way Down*, last year, it is good to welcome an author of comparable multiple award winning author. This one was first published in the States in 2016 and is the first of his “Run” (US title ‘The Runners’) quartet, the first book that has featured in the *New York Times* best seller lists. Each book is written from the point of view of a member of The Defenders youth running team, kids who have been brought together from different city backgrounds to take on the team, playing what the experience means for each of them. This is the story of Castle Cranshaw, aka Ghost, a boy whose father has been imprisoned for drug-related offenses, his mother, who is the centre at Castle and his mother. Ghost is haunted by the memory of his father and his own identity is punctuated by “alternatives” that lead to frequent school suspensions. It’s an old American story of how sports can transform troubled youth, but it’s an excellent and authentic version, with a convincing first person narrative that reveals Ghost in all his contradictions and charts his changing perceptions of himself, his community and his running mates. It’s told with economy, humour and understanding of the pressures of growing up, especially growing up poor in America. CB

**She Wolf**

Dan Smith, Chicken House, 320pp, 978 1 910655 93 1, £6.99 pbk

This is an atmospheric but somewhat bleak tale set in set in the cold, northern lands in the time of the Viking invasions of Britain. The story opens with the cruel murder of Yva’s mother and as we discover later her dog too. Yva believes she must avenge her mother’s death as is the Viking way. She is convinced a three-fingered man is the killer as she saw him leave the trading post hut her mother had entered.

Yva is an awkward and intense child and finds human contact difficult—she lives in her head, listening to her dog’s wise counsel and telling the old Norse tales she learned from her mother to comfort herself. We might think now she is borderline autistic. So, when a kind stranger, Cathryn, appears together with a boy, Bron, who can only communicate in sign language and offers Yva help, she brushes them off determined to manage on her own. But after a near-death encounter with slavers Yva reluctantly agrees it would be safer to travel with Cathryn. Although Yva is highly suspicious of Cathryn’s motives she gradually begins to trust her as Cathryn is unusually sympathetic to her needs.

Along the journey to find the three-fingered man they encounter fierce warriors, wolves and a very dangerous bear. Bron and Cathryn are forced to split up to confuse their pursuers. Cathryn decides to tail a large orphaned wolf cub they argue when Cathryn explains that the cub is a wild animal and not a dog. Cathryn falls on her kneeing and is back to being a girl but Yva manages to get her to a cave where she tends her and is with her when she dies. Yva finally faces the three-fingered man but realises too late that he is not what she thought he was and that her preconceptions may not always be right. Thankfully, Yva and Bron do reach a place of safety and there is happy ending of sorts.

This is a page-turning story: the desolate landscape is beautifully described throughout and Yva is a strong and brave heroine but the constant threat of danger and the unremitting hardship make this a discomforting read and it is at times hard to warm to it. There is a helpful glossary at the back of the book and some information on Viking life. This could be a good novel for class discussion. JC

**A Pinch of Magic**

Michelle Harrison, Simon and Schuster, 308 pp, 978 1 4711 2429 7, £6.99, pbk.

This is one of the Sorrow Isles: places of shadows, marsh and sea mists. The nearest other island is a prison, a further one a deserted cemetery; and, over all the isles, the weight of a dead woman’s curse. The Widdershins sisters are the particular victims of this curse, of any Widdershins daughter that seeks to leave Crowstone faces certain death beyond its perimeter to the sounds of crows screeching in her head. Adventurous middle daughter Betty would have found any restriction on her aspiration onerous, let alone one so draconian. So this is the tale of how Betty, teenage Fliss, and little Charlie risk everything to lift the curse. Luckily, they begin with the help of their tavern keeping Gran, who presents them each with a magic heirloom: a carpet bag for Charlie that can take them anywhere, an instant mirror for Fliss in which she can “face time” anyone wherever they are, and a set of Russian dolls for Betty herself whose properties can confer invisibility, as long as you remember the proper procedure. This is a fine piece of dark fantasy, in which, as in the tales that are its models, the human capacity for cruelty, sometimes visited by children, or sister on sister, is exceeded only by the strength of love. Michelle Harrison maintains the sense of doom, lightens it with flashes of humour, and creates a careering plot and interesting characters, gradually unravelling the secrets of the curse, as the sisters lurch from one perilous situation to another. It’s an ingenious and compelling tale. CB

**Scavengers**


This book has all the hallmarks of a tale from a distant, apocalyptic world, future, with a boy called Landfill and Babagoo-the man who looks after him-living in the most primitive of conditions and scavenging what they can from their environment in order to survive. The irony of this scenario is that the unkown to Landfill they are living in is still from the outside world, which Babagoo fears as a result of its corruption and cruelty. Landfill is named for the place where Babagoo found him, having been cast away from his mother and he is subject to Babagoo’s rules about how to keep safe and preserve the status quo.

The pair have developed their own idiosyncratic language variations—largely, though not exclusively onomatopoeic and terminology, which gives their conversations both interest and opaqueness. Their relationship shifts and changes but there seems to be real regard between them, woven through with Babagoo’s shifting parent/teacher/bully persona.

Babagoo constantly drills Landfill in his rules, which are many and particular. However necessary and sensible rules might be, however, they are there to be broken and Landfill, eager to see The Outside beyond their own world of Hawking and Babagoo, runs away. He’s told with economy, though complete with tentativeness and fearfully into the unknown. This has devastating consequences when Dawn, an Outsider, comes into contact with them. The only way to save the Outsider is from it. She is initially curious and then alarmed at Landfill’s lack of knowledge and understanding of her world and alert to the avengers to his situation. This-and Babagoo’s illness and subsequent death-mark the end of the Hinterland and the beginning of the end for life on The Outside. Landfill gets his first taste of this when he tries to go and buy medicine to treat the animal bite which Babagoo receives. We see our world through Landfill’s eyes and it is a source of shame to us. Greed, violence and a disregard for one’s fellow man prevail and Landfill-naive, sheltered, a lover of all living things-as is a loss to understand it. Yet, through Dawn, he has come to appreciate music and when, after the destruction of Hinterland, he is searching for food he follows its sound. He witnesses a baby being rescued from a tip site-rather too near an echo of his own fate—and recognises a spark of humanity within the rescuers and the book gives its chances in this new and startling environment. VR

**Halo Moon**

Sharon Cohen, Quercus, 340pp, 9787185645012, £6.99, pbk.

Sharon Cohen’s story features parallel narratives that eventually come together in an apocalyptic event on the Yorkshire moors. One strand is the story of Ageze, an Ethiopian boy who excavates three mysterious discs, associated metal pointers and a brass key from the sand near an ancient church. The discs are covered in symbols that form a single unit, and the key is turned. However, Ageze learns to read with the help of an old scholar. When the discs and key are assembled into a single unit, the key is turned, Ageze discovers the instrument (the Portendo device) has the uncanny ability to foresee impending disasters, like a nearby burst water main and factory fire. Meanwhile, in a small place...
Yorkshire village, the strikingly named Halo Moon is making a friend of Pedro Ortega, the new boy across the road, allowing them to study the stars at night and go for daytime walks on the moors. Back in Ethiopia, Ageze’s device reveals that the next catastrophe is due to happen in Yorkshire. It’s further away than usual, but he determines to make the long journey to warn those who are in the path of destruction. Arriving in Pockley, worse for wear from the journey, and befriended by Halo and Pedro, he then has to convince everyone to take him seriously. He does, and the village is evacuated, but then the children somehow find themselves in the very eye of the storm. A preface bravely declares that, while such a story might be unbelievable and impossible, it did all happen, I doubt whether any reader will believe that for a minute, but Cohen tells her story in the right way, and the ability to see the future, it’s a fiction that children might find seductive. CB

The Unworry Book

Alice James, ill. Stephen Moncrief, Dr Angharad Rudkin, Usborne Publishing, 96pp, 978 1 4749 5077 0, £8.99 hbk

The first point to make is that a child using this book must have his or her own copy. There are lots and lots of suggestions of things to do that mean writing IN the book, so this is not one for the library. It is sad that these days so many children suffer from worry, but so it is, and they are proliferating. This is a good one with some simple scientific explanations of how the body and the brain respond to worries and concerns and how to deal with them. A small black and white cuddly character is on every page and provides reassurance and advice, and the constant interspersed text and pictures are clear and concise. There are so many things to do, such as drawing patterns, dancing and being active, writing limericks or stories, scribbling, mindfulness, keeping a diary, yoga exercises, joining the dots, brain puzzles, origami, etc. It is all very positive and should provide many helpful hints and encouraging ideas for young minds, particularly those who worry excessively. ES

A Story About Cancer (With a Happy Ending)

India Desjardins, ill. Marianne Ferrer, Solange Ouellet (Translator), Frances Lincoln, 96pp, 978 1786 03218 8, £9.99 hbk

This story was written because a ten year old girl asked the author why no one seemed to write a cancer story with a happy ending. In the long drawn-out treatment that is usual for children with cancer of any kind, it would be simplistic to say that having a ‘happy ending’ is the be-all and end-all of their needs, but it is certainly the strongest and best outcome. The fifteen-year-old girl in this story explains the five years of her life since she was diagnosed, and it hasn’t been an easy journey: the pain associated with her chemo; the problems she has had with her hair loss, because they try too hard to be supportive and often get it wrong; her guilt feelings about her sister who doesn’t get enough attention; her friend, Maxine, who has died from Leukaemia she herself suffers from and whom she misses very much; how she longs to be treated as ‘normal’ and how she meets Victor, her boyfriend, who is the only one who ‘gets it’. At the beginning of the story, she and her parents are walking to the appointment with the specialist who will tell her if her condition is cured or, transversely, if the illness is going to kill her. Beautifully written, with emotions shown rather than said to be a grey shadow of herself, the only colour being of others around her, until the end when she and Victor fall in love. I am sure that those who have been taken in by the local vicar who objects to the zoo being open on Sundays. For Danny life gets even worse when a man appears purporting to be his long lost father. This all sets the scene for false accusations, barrels of gunpowder, and an elephant losing half a tusk. The reader feels for Danny having his emotions played with, whether he can believe Mr. Larkin, and then finding it so difficult to believe that Mr. Jameson hopes will bring in a great crowd of people and secure his zoo. But there are people who hate the Royal Family and have other plans for the land and the animals. Mr. Jameson had done this is complicated by the local vicar who objects to the zoo being open on Sundays. For Danny life gets even worse when a man appears purporting to be his long lost father. This all sets the scene for false accusations, barrels of gunpowder, and an elephant losing half a tusk. The reader feels for Danny having his emotions played with, whether he can believe Mr. Larkin, and then finding it so difficult to believe that Mr. Jameson hopes will bring in a great crowd of people and secure his zoo. But there are people who hate the Royal Family and have other plans for the land and the animals. Mr. Jameson had done...
beautiful, bizarre and bouncy local people and wildlife. There is a quirky bartender who serves nothing but beer, stew or customer’s own body parts, and there are tribal religious zealots ready to sacrifice anything that moves. There are also lots and lots of brains in jars. None of these peoples are as weird as the professor, though, who is hundreds of years old, rides a moped and insists on stopping for tea and sandwiches, even when being chased by magical-spear-wielding warlords!

Sadly, the excitement offered by these kaleidoscopic settings and intrigues is rather short-lived as the entire second half of the novel takes place on one planet: Outlandish. Outlandish is packed with a plethora of mythical creatures that have already been made ultra-famous in other stories. Gold-hoarding dragons soar over the heads of westful woodland elves, while knights and wizards hatch schemes to vanquish villains. Though there are subtle twists on these familiar elements, the knight is called Sir Brenda, for example), even younger readers will feel that they have ultimately met them all before, which is a shame as the predictability that emerges detracts significantly from the humour and excitement that is prominent in early chapters.

Apple and The Professor are a great team and readers will be rooting for them as they stumble their way across the universe trying to get home for tea and sandwiches, even when being chased by magical-spear-wielding warlords!

The Closest Thing to Flying

Gill Lewis, Oxford, 240pp, 978 19 274948 2, £6.99 pbk

Samira Solomon is eleven years old. She lives as an illegal immigrant in modern London with her mother and Robel. Robel is the same man who trafficked the two of them from Eritrea. Samira’s mother speaks very little English. She is under the complete control of Robel. Both Samira and her mother are abused by this criminal companion.

One of her rare trips out of the home Samira finds and buys a hat decorated with a stuffed green bird. The hat came in a box. In that box she also finds a diary kept by twenty year old Henrietta Waterman in the 1890s. The diary entries reveal that Henrietta was a young girl. Henrietta is the same woman who revolutionised the lives of all those concerned.

It is sometimes said that young readers find history boring and uninteresting. This book demonstrates that it need not be so. Lewis achieves a feat which has become increasingly popular in young literature – combining a narrative with issues that are too prevalent in contemporary society, such as trafficking of people. She also shows how some contemporary organisations have their origins in the past. In this case she describes the founding meeting of what was to become the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

This reviewer’s main misgiving about an otherwise outstanding book is that the narratives of some of the characters are developed enough to whet the reader’s appetite but not enough to satisfy that appetite. There are some unfinished portraits. RB
**Outside**


Like Rapunzel, Ele is a captive in a tower, or rather imagining herself as a fairy tale princess helps her survive the unimaginable horror of her life. Ele has been imprisoned in a windowless room – six strides long – for most of her young life. Food drops from the ceiling, ‘sun bars’ flick on and then off, and disinfectant ‘rains’ down at regular intervals. She shares the space with the ‘Others’, three friends who may or may not be real, and knocks messages out to ‘Jack’, a prisoner in another part of the tower.

Of course there’s a ‘Him’ behind this, Ele describes him to us one physical attribute at a time – the sound of his footsteps, his thick fingers, scratchy lips. It makes him less human, more monstrous. Her descriptions of his actions towards her are more chilling for the details Ele leaves out, but she is clear when she describes how he murdered her brother. Through all this, dreams of escaping to the ‘Outside’ sustain her, and she finally makes it, fleeing into a wild Scottish landscape naked and knowing nothing of the world other than what she has gleaned from her book of fairy stories.

She finds refuge with a boy called Willow and his father, who she fears at first is a giant. The tone changes for this section of the book and is less intense, more sentimentally – putting some strain on credibility – but Ele’s voice, always clear, direct and engaging, keeps readers with her. We know of course that Ele will have to go back to face him and to save her friends, and the climax is almost unbearably tense.

Comparisons with Emma Donoghue’s *Room* are inevitable, but Outside feels fiercely original. It’s not easy to write a character in the situation described and keep them cheerful, optimistic, credible, but Juckes manages it. This is well-written, sensitive on issues such as sexual abuse, and, whether in her tower or the outside world, Ele’s voice and vision of the world will keep readers intrigued. MMA

Rayne and Delliath’s *Midnite Matinee*


This novel runs the gamut from surreal to affecting: the introductory chapters introduce readers to Josie and Delia, who have their own, self-produced horror TV show. This features such bizarre delights as dog weddings, skeleton raves and showings of films which are so bad they seem in danger of becoming cult.

Into this rather improbable-if sometimes entertaining-scenario the author inserts Lawson- a young man who, like Rapunzel, is a captive in a tower and keeps them cheerful, optimistic, credible, but Juckes manages it. This is well-written, sensitive on issues such as sexual abuse, and, whether in her tower or the outside world, Ele’s voice and vision of the world will keep readers intrigued. MMA

**Proud**


The authors and illustrators in this new collection of stories were each given the theme of pride, and asked to respond to it. Contributors range from the very well-known – David Levithan, Tanya Byrne, David Roberts, Steve Antony, Caroline Bird – to young authors and illustrators being published for the first time. Whatever the setting for their story, a boy with there’s an overarching sense of love and support, every story gives voice to the LGBTQ+ experience and a shared sense of celebration that the stories will do more than entertain readers: after all, as one of the characters says, ‘We take stories to heart, even when they are our own.’

Coming out is a recurring theme, from Caroline Bird’s witty opening poem *Dive Bar*, to Dean Ahta’s *How To Come Out As Gay*, which concludes the book. For many of the characters it isn’t easy, and help comes from, among other things, gay penguins in a zoo, a phoenix, the owner of a record shop, a somewhat eccentric driving instructor, even Lady Gaga via the Philadelphia Queer Youth Choir – a list that gives a sense of the sheer variety of the stories included. Communities play a major role in stories of those choosing new names and; the family he left behind is a recurring theme, the expectation of a new family, the hope of being accepted.

**All the Invisible Things**


Helvatica Lake, known as Vetty, is aged 16. Her sister Ariel is nine years younger. Three years before Collins now begins, their mother lost their mother to cancer. During these three years Helvatica, Ariel and their bereaved father have lodged in Somerset with their aunt Wendy and the aunt’s gay partner Fran, while their father is mourning his loss.

Eventually their father decides that it is time for the family to return to London, Vetty welcomes this decision. She will renew her friendship with Peregrine, known as Pez, taken on by whom she has been friends since they were both ten. Collins now sets out to describe the renewal of this friendship and the problems Vetty and Pez face as they grow up, including a discussion of burgeoning sexual awareness.

The book begins with a structural difficulty. In the early pages Collins takes trouble to introduce and develop a cast of characters whom the reader expects to play a significant part in the unfolding narrative. But with the move back to London these characters disappear almost for good. They certainly take a back seat in the structure of the book.

The major strength of this book is its detailed consideration of a topic hardly ever broached in literature for this age group – namely an addiction to online pornography. Such addiction and the way it erodes the character of the victim are described in painful detail. Collins’s text explores not only the way in which the addiction takes hold, but also the reasons why such a preoccupation exists. RB

**My Brother’s Name is Jessica**


My copy of the novel was accompanied by a reflective letter from John Boyne to his readers. In his books for younger readers, he is concerned to write about “children who are isolated in some way”. It is important, he believes, to come up for those who are oppressed or bullied, even when offering support can prove costly. His own journey through his teens misfired – the prospect of coming out as a gay man terrified him; but when he did so around the age of twenty, life became “a million times better”. In this novel, Jason, the idolised 17 year old brother of narrator Sam, is also very anxious as he tells his family he plans to trans to female in the name of freedom, her mother’s support, her drive to young transgender people while working on the story – how impressed he was by their bravery, their honesty and their fight to convince people fear what they don’t understand.

**My Brother’s Name is Jessica** isn’t quite the book readers of Boyne’s hit *Boy* can expect. He has a sharp talent for satire and for much of the narrative the parents of Jason and Sam are treated with comic mockery. This is no ordinary family. Mum is a Cabinet Minister and the top job is almost within her grasp; Dad is her private secretary, ensuring the young people and shamed by Mum’s drive to No.10. So when Jason – an outstanding footballer – turns down a chance to sign for Arsenal because he doesn’t want soccer to absorb all his time, Dad’s reaction is: “It would look very bad for your Mum if you were signed to a professional club.” Mum looks at him with love and says, “You’re selfish. You only ever think about yourself”.

These parents are close to caricature, but seemed destined to be in fiction for young readers. Mum’s concerned that a mixed-race family moving in nearby will damage her political image as well as bringing down property values. She is also implausibly
stupid; although Britain is in a period of anti-EU sentiment, she has to enquire, “is the Czech Republic in the EU?” The parents will surely amuse readers, as will Mum’s sister, Aunt Rose, who is a kind of ultra-Green, late Sixties hippy, never seen with the same colour hair twice. So far, she has traded in three husbands, as well as her polluting car which she’s swapped for an elderly horse called Bertie Wooster. She is absolutely on Jason’s side and warmly empathetic towards young Sam too.

These broad-brush characters work fine as comedy; maybe they will provide a vehicle for an AM reading. Is a further book to be a part of this “Boyne” series? The problem comes with Boyne’s treatment of Jason and Sam as they make their coming of age journey through the plot. Jason, who struggles with dyslexia, is vulnerable at school, finding it difficult to make friends until he meets Laura, the daughter of Mum’s rival for the leadership of the party. Boyne creates an engaging, hesitant tenderness between them. Jason/Jessica and Sam are convincingly aware of the hurt that their affection and care for each other, even as they negotiate misunderstandings and anxieties – their relationship is so intimate relationships to the realms of the sewer. A discerning sense of significance for young people and relevant also to the wider community.

In the later chapters, things change. As the news of Jason’s transitioning becomes public, Mum and Dad confront their own failure to listen and support; they become the concerned parents will surely amuse readers, as will Mum’s sister, Aunt Rose, who is a kind of ultra-Green, late Sixties hippy, never seen with the same colour hair twice. So far, she has traded in three husbands, as well as her polluting car which she’s swapped for an elderly horse called Bertie Wooster. She is absolutely on Jason’s side and warmly empathetic towards young Sam too.

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The strange fate of Rip Van Winkle

Brian Alderson contemplates unlucky Rip Van Winkle’s encounter with the fairies.

The fairies

employ several techniques in anaesthetising those so fortunate or unfortunate as to encounter their ministrations. Look at the famous Sleeping Beauty (originally known as La Belle au Bois Dormant). Pricked on the finger by a spindle she not only fell asleep for a hundred years but carried the denizens of the castle with her, all of whom were isolated behind a giant hedge of immediate growth. When eventually the spell was lifted everything came to life again. The dinner started cooking (a bit off, I imagine), the kitchen boy caught the clip round the ear that he was due a hundred years before, and the princess was ashamed that her accoutrements were no longer in the height of fashion.

Things were different

with the little girl in the manuscript story from Wilhelm Grimm, converted into Dear Millie, the picture book by Maurice Sendak. The fairy is the unlikely figure of St Joseph who looks after the girl, escaping from a war, for three days; when she returns to her mother she is still a girl but thirty years have passed.

And Rip Van Winkle

was in similar case but not quite the same. He was a lackadaisical householder living in a New Amsterdam settlement up in the Catskill Mountains and he was at the mercy of a termagant wife for his undomesticated ways. Rather than manage his farm he liked to gossip with comrades under the rubicund portrait of His Majesty George the Third round the pub, while to escape ‘the enduring and all-besetting terrors of the woman’s tongue’, he would wander off with his dog Wolf fishing the local streams or shooting squirrels.

On one such expedition

he found himself in a little known gulley where he was surprised to be accosted by name by ‘a short, square-built old fellow, with thick bushy hair and a grizzled beard, who was bearing a heavy keg of liquor. Rip, who was a friendly chap, offered help and the two of them ended up in ‘a hollow like a small amphitheatre’ where there was a group of solemn and similarly clad old gents, playing at ninepins. They refreshed themselves with the contents of the keg, which were also much to the liking of Rip, and before long he could not help it but slumber overtook him.

Rip Van Winkle

arrived on the scene in 1819-20 in a two-volume collection of essays by the American author Washington Irving, writing under a pseudonym as The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. The story was twinned by a second one, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and they were in fact written in England where Irving was living at the time. Although first published in America they were quickly followed by a London edition which Irving published to protect his British copyright.

Although his tale

was not written specifically for children, its folktale theme placed it firmly within the canon and it may be seen as the first American work to achieve a classic status in the children’s literature of that country. Its comparative brevity allowed for publication as a single, often substantially illustrated volume, one of the earliest notable editions being produced as an artistic ‘table book’ with etchings by F.O. Darley.

Undoubtedly though

its most famous presentation was as a trend-setting example for the fashionable Edwardian ‘gift-books’. As such, it also saw the arrival of Arthur Rackham in full fig as a picture-book artist, exhibiting the failings of ‘art’ in the role of illustration. To begin with the whole affair was an exercise in the making of a book to be treasured for its fancy rather than its literary qualities, being offered in short-run, large-paper editions, signed by the illustrator and with bindings de luxe. In addition though the multiple colour plates, were printed by the new method of three- or four-colour separations. These required the use of a glossy paper and they were mounted on a thicker paper-stock and divorced from the story in a bundle at the end of the text. There is no denying the brilliance of Rackham’s draftsmanship, evident as stunningly in his pen drawing as his over-detailed colour work. But he has lifted poor old Rip out of his unpretentious rural fastness into the drawing rooms of the gentry.

Rip Van Winkle and Other Stories is published by Puffin Classics, 978-0141330921, £6.99 pbk

Rip Van Winkle illustrated by Arthur Rackham is published by Pook Press, 978-1447449553, £17.99 hbk