

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

No.240

January 2020

the children's book magazine online

Authorgraph interview Ross MacKenzie

New Year Predictions

What to Read in 2020

Celebrating Jan Mark



www.booksforkeeps.co.uk

CONTENTS

JANUARY 2020

- 2 Editorial 2020:** a big year for BfK
- 3 New Year predictions** what will be the big issues for children's books in the year ahead?
- 4 Books of the Year 2020** children's editors share their picks
- 8 Ten essential books for young readers** chosen by Philip Reeve
- 10 Authorgraph:** Ross MacKenzie interviewed by Jane Sandell
- 12 Windows into Illustration:** Ken Wilson-Max
- 14 The best art form:** an extract from the new edition of Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling
- 16 Knights of:** meet the publisher doing things differently
- 17 A House Without Walls:** an interview with Elizabeth Laird
- 18 Beyond the Secret Garden** A sporting chance
- 20 I Wish:** Roopa Farooki chooses
- 20 Good Reads:** Roopa Farooki chooses
- 21 Jan Mark is Here:** a new website and new story collection for the acclaimed author
- 22 Reviewers and reviews** List of reviewers
5-8 (Infant/Junior)
8-10 (Junior/Middle)
10-14 (Middle/Secondary)
+ Ed's Choice, + New Talent
14+ (Secondary/Adult)
- 32 Classics in Short No. 139** What on earth did Katy do to become a classic?

COVER STORY

This issue's cover illustration is from **Evernight** written by **Ross MacKenzie**. Thanks to **Andersen Press** for their help with this January cover.



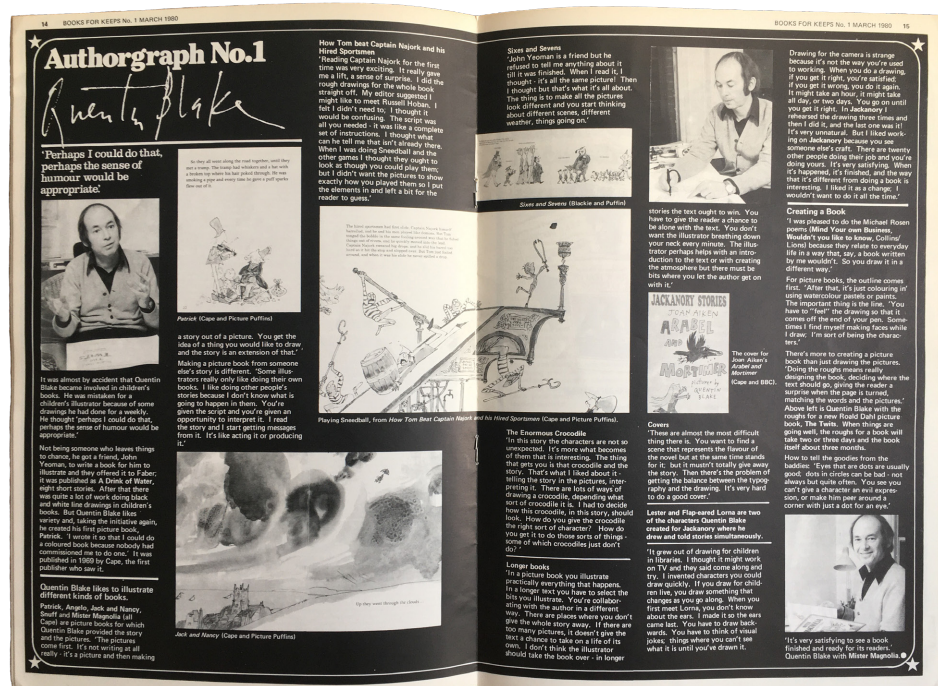
2020: Happy New Year



As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, **Books for Keeps** is preparing to celebrate our 40th anniversary. Issue number one – featuring an Authorgraph interview with Quentin Blake – was published in March 1980 and we've been taking children's books seriously ever since. Indeed, this issue's Authorgraph interview with Ross MacKenzie is the 240th in a series that features the most important children's writers and illustrators of our time, from Victor Ambrus (number 74) to Benjamin Zephaniah (number 111).

We hope our readers will take part in the celebrations and we'd love to hear your thoughts and comments on the magazine. You can send them to enquiries@booksforkeeps.co.uk. Watch out for news of special events taking place throughout the year and do encourage friends and colleagues to sign up for our newsletters to get all the latest information delivered into their inboxes.

You'll notice changes and new features through the year, and we'll be working on a major refresh for the website, to equip **Books for Keeps** for the future. If you'd like to be part of our ongoing story, make a donation via the PayPal button on our homepage so that **Books for Keeps** can continue to document the children's book world with intelligence, scholarship and wit.



Books for Keeps

January 2020 No.240

ISSN 0143-909X
© Books for Keeps CIC 2016

Managing Editor: Andrea Reece
Editorial advisor: Ferelith Hordon
Editorial assistant: Alexia Counsell
Design: Louise Millar

Editorial correspondence should be sent to Books for Keeps,
30 Winton Avenue London N11 2AT.

Books for Keeps is available online at

www.booksforkeeps.co.uk

A regular BfK Newsletter can also be sent by email.

To sign up for the Newsletter, go to

www.booksforkeeps.co.uk and follow the Newsletter link.

If any difficulty is experienced, email addresses can also be sent to enquiries@booksforkeeps.co.uk*

Email: enquiries@booksforkeeps.co.uk

Website: www.booksforkeeps.co.uk

*Email addresses will be used by **Books for Keeps** only for the purpose of emailing the Newsletter and will not be disclosed to third parties.



2020: a look ahead Part One

What will be the main talking points and issues for the children's book world in the year ahead? Key figures share their hopes, intentions and predictions.

Cressida Cowell

As **Waterstones Children's Laureate**, I am launching two big campaigns this year: one on creativity and one about school libraries. I hope that everyone feels as passionately as I do about the importance of both. As it says on my Laureate Charter, every child has the right to be creative (without being marked) for fifteen minutes a week. Every child also has the right to read for the joy of it, and to access new books in a well-stocked school library.

2019 was the year that kids around the world marched to protest climate change, and I hope 2020 is the year that the adults actually listen. Every child has the right to have a planet to read on.

Nick Poole, Chief Executive, CILIP, the UK library and information association

CILIP has announced 'Books and Reading' as our theme for 2020 in celebration of the surge of interest in readership and the fantastic work being done by publishers, authors and illustrators.

Libraries today are built around a core offer of 'books, digital and amazing experiences', which is helping us to reach a new audience and new relevance to people's daily lives. Our ambition is see a world in which readers can discover great, diverse books through libraries and bookshops, publishers can run successful businesses and authors are recognised and paid for their work – and where we all understand the value each other brings to our 'Nation of Readers'. We hope that 2020 brings us closer to this reality.

It has been good to see the book world starting to think hard about its role in addressing climate change and in making real progress on equality, diversity, inclusion and representation. Here's hoping this leads to real, lasting change in 2020!

Jill Coleman, Director Children's Books, BookTrust

In 2020, **BookTrust** will be publishing an update of our **BookTrust Represents** research. Our previous research showed that, in 2017, under 6% of published children's books were by authors or illustrators of colour. Since then, we have seen a number of vibrant new authors and illustrators being published – Sharna Jackson and Dapo Adeola to name just two of my favourites. There is a real energy around publishing a more diverse range of authors and illustrators to reflect our world, where 32% of school age children are BAME. So I am very hopeful that our new research will show an increase on that 2017 6%. I hope that this energy also signals a wider determination by all of us in the children's book world to stay relevant to modern children and to make sure that reading for pleasure is something enjoyed by all children, not just an increasingly elite few.

Miranda McKearney, founder of EmpathyLab

It's not often that an industry is able to develop a whole new 'why', an articulation of the social good generated by its products. But that's the position I believe the book industry is in, building on the scientific research showing the empathy-building power of reading. This opens up a new frontier which, in 2020, is going to be very important.

In the face of society's empathy crisis, the industry is poised to drive forward a new empathy movement. This will build on recently developed tools like an annual Empathy Day, and the formation of an Empathy Circle strategy group of nine publishers.

The year begins on 22 January with the launch of EmpathyLab's 2020 Read For Empathy book collection (www.empathylab.uk/2019-read-for-empathy-collections*). These 50 books for 4-16 year olds kick start year-round empathy work in schools and libraries.

Fuelled by concerns about our empathy deficit, there has been an explosion in participation from these partners. For instance public library participation has risen 480% since the first Empathy Day in 2017, and now involves 92 library services. School and library staff say they are hungry for new ways to deploy the power of books, and inspired by the vision of raising an empathy-skilled generation, capable of building a better world.

Tom Palmer, recipient of the 2019 Ruth Rendell Award for the author who has had the most significant influence on literacy in the UK in the past year.

When I go into schools to talk about my books – and reading in general – I find myself drawn by the children into discussing the big issues far more than I used to. Children – from year three to year nine – want to talk about the environment, about refugees, about war and, particularly, about how the more vulnerable amongst us are treated by everybody else. I've been visiting schools for fifteen years now and there has been a definite sea change.

I believe that teachers' increasing determination to carve out the time to read whole books in class, then talking about the issues those books raise, is creating this phenomenon. Along with the fact that publishers are publishing more books that ignite and fuel these discussions.

Teresa Cremin, Professor of Education (Literacy) at The Open University

Predicting trends for 2020 is like playing the piano as a novice in the dark (and as a pianist I'm a novice!) However, regardless of the election's outcome, uncertainty will persist and major societal issues such as migration, homelessness, poverty, oppression and gun crime will, I suggest, be evidenced in children's books too. We are in an era in which worrying about the world and its longevity – about climate change and our collective responsibilities – are also to the forefront, as indeed they should be, and authors and publishers will I think embed their attention to these agendas. Young people too are keen to read and discuss such issues. So texts which reflect the realities of the world will continue to grow (for younger readers too) and so they should. Such texts can help us all as we seek to understand complexity and explore responsible ways forward. Books matter.

Fen Coles, co-director Letterbox Library

The impact of the **CLPE's** groundbreaking **Reflecting Realities** report will continue to be felt as it enters its third year of research, with publishers newly motivated to look at the representation of characters of colour in children's books not just in terms of quantity/numbers but in terms of quality – the nuances of authentic and meaningful representation. The upward trajectory of non-fiction anthologies will persist, but mini bio collections of famous men or women will give way to titles which canonise 'everyday' people, in particular young people with their acts of protest and defiance. The words and actions of the iconic Greta Thunberg will be eagerly captured and preserved in children's literature, across every format. Queer characters will finally come into their own. No longer confined to YA as if LGBT identities constitute a mature 'subject'; no longer anthropomorphised into (however adorable) penguins or aardvarks or snails (yes, that happened); no longer diluted into miniature background thumbprints of same-sex couples, designed to give a picture book a flourish of 'modernity' or 'edginess'... In 2020, I feel sure these wallflowers will come out into the light and take centre stage as fully fledged humans in picture books and in that lovely revived format of highly-illustrated first chapter books. I shall look forward to that.

Sue Bastone, SLA Vice-Chair (Chair June 2020)

In recent years we've seen a return to adventure and escapism. The continuing popularity of **Harry Potter** and **Star Wars** and the revival of **His Dark Materials** on the BBC to name just a few, remind us that a good, escapist adventure appeals to all ages. We live in difficult times and, whether adult or child, stories are the way we make sense of our world and understand the fight between good and evil. In Pullman's **His Dark Materials**, the quest for knowledge is key and, in our era of fake news, political lies and slogans, it is vital that our children learn how to find, understand and tell the truth.

The book world can, and already is, setting an example and I hope and expect that this is an issue we will find features more and more in children's books. As Greta Thunberg says: 'no one is too small to make a difference' and we need to empower our children to stand up for the truth.

2020: a look ahead Part Two

Books of the Year as chosen by their editors

Which are the books to watch in 2020? We asked leading editors to tell us about the book (one only) they are most excited to be publishing in the year ahead.

Kirsty Stansfield, Nosy Crow Head of Fiction

I read an extract from **The Girl Who Stole an Elephant** in a creative writing anthology and fell in love with it immediately. Chaya's voice was so strong and her adventure so compelling, the book's star quality shone out right away. Author Nizrana Farook writes so beautifully about Serendib, you can taste the jambu fruit and smell the ocean and imagine escaping trouble on the back of the King's (stolen) elephant! I can't wait for this brilliant book to fall into the right hands, and as many of them as possible!

Jane Winterbotham, Deputy MD and UK Publishing Director of Walker Books

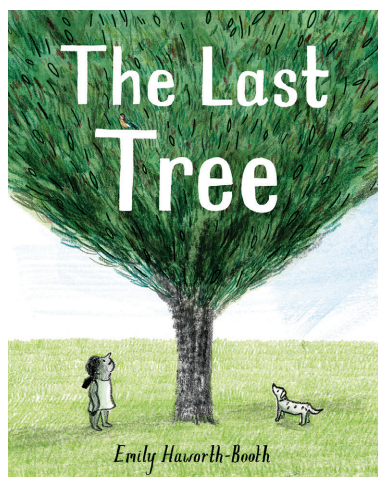
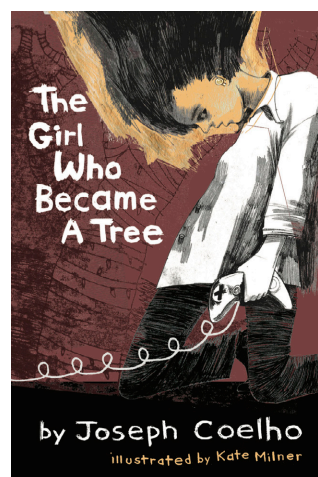
What could be better, in the 20th anniversary year of Alex Rider, than to be publishing a brand new novel in the series! Publishing in April, **Nightshade** brings all the excitement and thrills that Alex fans have come to love to a mission that takes the world's favourite teen superspy to Brazil, Gibraltar and Crete, culminating in a thrilling showdown set against the London skyline. Action-packed and with a twisting plot that keeps the reader constantly at the edge of their seat, this is classic Anthony Horowitz. Fans new and old have a treat in store.

Jane Griffiths, Simon and Schuster Editorial Director

2020 is set to be a really exciting year for Simon & Schuster with brilliant new books from authors like Abi Elphinstone, Michelle Harrison, Ben Miller and Adam Silvera to name just a few as well as some exciting new names joining our list like Sophy Henn, Sarah Lean and Katie and Kevin Tsang so it's hard to pick just one favourite! But one book I can't wait to publish is **And The Stars Were Burning Brightly** by Danielle Jawando, an extraordinary novel about loss, love and the importance of speaking up when all you want to do is shut down. In an age where social media is adding an extra layer of pressure to teenagers and having a real impact on their mental health, this feels like such an important book to be publishing and Danielle is an incredible new talent on the YA scene.

Janetta Otter-Barry, MD Otter-Barry Books

I'm proud and honoured to be publishing Joseph Coelho's major new collection **The Girl Who Became a Tree A Story Told in Poems** (September). Set in a library and a dangerous forest, the multi-layered poetic narrative charts teenage Daphne's grief and isolation after her father's death, taking her and the reader on a gripping, heartrending journey that ends in hope and reconciliation. A lost phone, a deceitful creature, a boy-tree, gaming, painful memories, family crisis.... Real life and fantasy are interwoven with the Greek myth of Apollo and Daphne in this powerful story for readers of 11 and up from one of the most exciting poets writing today, with amazing illustrations by Kate Milner.



Barry Cunningham, MD Chicken House

The Loop by Ben Oliver is a coruscating debut from an astonishingly confident young Glaswegian novelist – it's the first in a trilogy which blew us away. It's a futuristic prison break story about what happens when AI takes control in a society that is being fooled by politicians... Sound familiar? Well, lots of fans agree already – it's been snapped up by Lime Pictures and Louise Sutton (producer of **Black Mirror**), foreign rights have sold in 11 countries so far, and we publish simultaneously in both the UK and USA in April 2020. This is pure high-octane excitement, and a worthy new voice to join **The Maze Runner** and **The Hunger Games** in fandoms worldwide!

Neil Dunncliffe, Publisher, Pavilion Children's Books

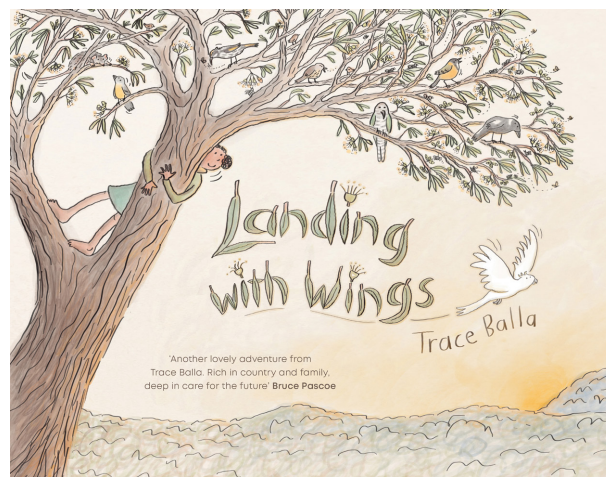
Emily Haworth-Booth's picture book debut, **The King Who Banned the Dark**, was a huge hit, shortlisted for numerous prizes, and **The Last Tree** is, I think, even stronger. The story starts with a group of friends looking for a place to live. They settle in an unspoiled forest, but before long start cutting down trees to make fire, shelters and homes. Soon, only one tree is left, and it is down to the children to save it. Beautifully illustrated in Emily's trademark limited palette, this book has an important message told with a light touch and lots of humour. It's the perfect picture book for our times.

Anthony Hinton, Commissioning Editor at David Fickling Books

Freddy vs School (July) is an absolute treat! It's the debut novel from Neill Cameron, who writes and illustrates award-winning comics for DFB and our sister company **The Phoenix Comic**. **Freddy vs School** stars **Freddy**, who is 9, loves looking cool in front of his friends, and also is an awesome robot. But it turns out that teachers get really angry when you use your rocket boosters to show off at school. Can Freddy stay true to himself without getting expelled? It's been fabulous to have Neill bring his natural storytelling genius to illustrated fiction.

Erica Wagner, Publisher Children & Young Adult, Allen & Unwin

Trace Balla's graphic novel picture books **Rivertime** and **Rockhopping**, and the forthcoming **Landing with Wings**, reflect her passion for the natural world. Through lyrical words and pictures she encourages readers of all ages to slow down and observe the world around them. **Landing With Wings** (September) is the story of Miri and her mum, settling in to a new town, making friends, learning about the land's Indigenous history and culture. Miri keeps a nature diary, and in writing about the plants and animals and places around her, she shows how gentle observation and engagement with the natural world can have a ripple effect on not only her own psyche, but all those around her. In the context of the enormous challenges that are upon Australia right now, Trace's books are a beautiful way to engage and educate the young, and their parents.



Ruth Huddleston, Publisher, Old Barn Books

Boy, Everywhere by A.M. Dassu (August) chronicles the harrowing journey taken from Syria to the UK by Sami and his family. From privilege to poverty, across countries and continents, from a smuggler's den in Turkey to a prison in Manchester. It is a story of survival, of family, of bravery.... and how thin the line is between 'us' and 'them'. A.M. Dassu writes with skill and empathy and an immediacy that communicates directly with her audience. I love her passion for the craft of writing and her joy in sharing that with readers.

Anna McQuinn, Editor-at-Large, Alanna Max

This year we are thrilled to publish Ken Wilson-Max's first title with AlannaMax. **Lenny and Wilbur** is perfect for very young readers. Lenny and his dog Wilbur who are best friends. They do everything together and on Wilbur's wash day, there is even more fun to be had. This book is full of joy – there are treats and tickles, suds and giggles, songs and snuggles. The special relationship between a little boy and his dog shines through the illustrations and will warm the heart of any reader. Totally endearing!

Sam Hutchinson, Publisher, b small publishing

Following our **Blue Peter Book Award**-winning **Real-life Mysteries** was always going to be a challenge. Luckily author Susan Martineau and illustrator Vicky Barker have created a perilously good read in **Real-life Disasters** (May). From sinking ships to killer lakes and deadly diseases, we invite children to test their critical literacy skills and investigate what really happened. Maybe what they learn will help them avoid major peril. Our advice: listen to the experts!

David Bennett, Boxer Books

The 2020 title I'm most excited about is **Who is in the Egg?** by Alexandra Milton. It is a simple concept illustrated with truly extraordinary artwork. The author and artist refers to her work as 'ripped and torn paper' which totally undervalues the detailed and intricate nature of the life-like illustrations. The book is a fascinating and surprising collection of animals and their eggs and their young. It's a natural history guessing game!

Lindsey Heaven, Editorial Director, Egmont

The sequel to out-of-the-blocks hit **A Good Girl's Guide to Murder**, 2019's no.1 bestselling children's/YA debut, is as twisty, page-turning and surprising as its predecessor. In **Good Girl, Bad Blood**, Holly Jackson takes us back to Pip (now the star of her own true-crime podcast) and Ravi as they investigate a new crime – it's just as close to home, but this time everyone is listening. Holly's star is firmly in the ascendancy and her YA and adult fans are clamouring for this. I'm right there with them.

Melissa Fairley, Publishing Director, Egmont

Michael Morpurgo has adapted his hugely popular novel **War Horse** for a picture book audience, with stunning illustrations by Tom Clohosy Cole. The enduring story of friendship between a horse and his boy takes centre stage in this sensitive re-telling that will help younger readers begin to understand the history and deadly chaos of the First World War. This is an important book for generations to come as we continue to strive for peace across the world.

Chloe Sackur, Commissioning Editor fiction, Andersen Press

Alex Wheatle's **Cane Warriors** is a short, sharp shock of a novel. Moa, an adolescent boy who was born into slavery, joins an uprising led by the indomitable Tacky against the British plantation owners. Together, the warriors seek to free everyone with the rallying cry 'De blood remembers'. Alex doesn't shy away from the brutal reality of 18th-century Jamaica, but also fills the pages with heartening scenes of courage and

brotherhood, nerve-shredding tension, and a striking sense of place. No wonder: this true tale comes from the very region Alex's mother grew up in. We're thrilled to be publishing it.

Georgia Amson-Bradshaw, Publisher, Wide Eyed Editions

I Am Not a Label busts the myths around disability by celebrating the stories of 30 real-life activists, thinkers, artists and athletes. The extraordinary lives of these ordinary people – from Stevie Wonder to Stephen Hawking, Frida Kahlo to Stella Young – show that, far from obstacles to be overcome, mental and physical disabilities are normal parts of life. In her fun and honest biographies, author Cerrie Burnell sets out to give young readers new icons from throughout history and the world, while showing that disabled people are sporty, musical, geeky, talented, happy, sad, outgoing or shy – just like non-disabled people.

Sarah Lambert, Fiction Editorial Director Hodder Children's Books

Jamie McFlair vs the Boyband Generator by Luke Franks & Sean Thorne: four best friends, two boybands, and an evil uncle with a monstrous secret – what could possibly go wrong? September sees a huge launch for us with this brilliant author duo and their hilarious new series for 8+ readers. Luke is a presenter on **CITV's Scrambled** while Sean is a presenter on the **Fun Kids Radio Show** and runs a successful **YouTube** gaming channel. Together they are comedy gold and we can't wait for kids to fall over themselves for more ridiculous adventures with Jamie McFlair.

Leah Willey, Children's Development and Commissioning Editor, Laurence King

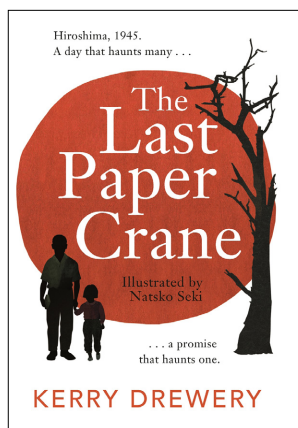
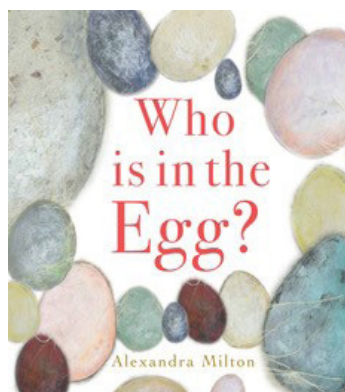
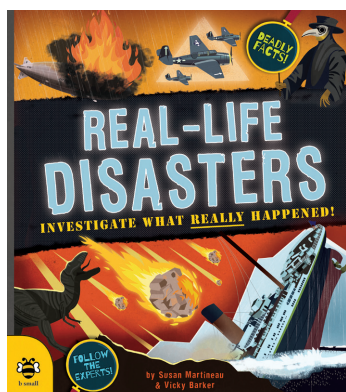
We're extremely excited to be publishing **Mythopedia: An Encyclopedia of Mythical Beasts and their Magical Tales**. From the cute but troublesome Tanuki, a racoon-like creature of Japanese folklore, to Ahuizotl, the scary water dog with a taste for eyeballs, this fantastic guide takes readers on a mythological tour of the world. Featuring maps and in-depth stories, we meet magical beasts from a huge variety of cultures, including Ancient Egyptian legend, Norse mythology and Aztec folklore. Fully illustrated with stunning, hand-painted artwork from the **Good Wives and Warriors** team, this beautiful book is sure to have both children and adults captivated!

Emma Matthewson, Executive Publisher, Bonnier Children's Books

The Last Paper Crane by Kerry Drewery is a mix of narrative and verse, set in modern day Japan and Hiroshima where a Japanese teenager, Mizuki, is worried about her grandfather. We move to 1945 and Mizuki's grandfather as a teenage boy at home with his friend Hiro. Moments later the horrific nuclear bomb is dropped on Hiroshima and a searing account of the devastation follows. The two boys search for Keiko, Hiro's five-year-old sister, leaving origami paper cranes everywhere a survivor could be, but cannot find her. Despite the harrowing subject matter, this powerful novel has hope at its heart. Kerry has done extensive research to authenticate this unforgettable story, which includes stunning illustrations by Japanese artist Natsko Seki.

Helen Diamond, Editorial Director, Education, Bloomsbury

There are many books I'm excited about publishing in 2020 but if I have to choose just one, then **It's OK to Cry** by Molly Potter, illustrated by Sarah Jennings, has to be it. Boy's mental health is a huge issue in this country backed up by the shocking statistic that suicide is the single biggest cause of death for men under the age of 45 in the UK. This charming picture book helps children (especially boys) identify their feelings and find the words to describe them. And it's not a book just for boys – girls will enjoy reading it too!



Alice Curry, Commissioning Editor, Lantana

The book I'm most excited to publish in 2020 brings a bright ray of sunshine to these cold winter months. **I Am Brown** by Ashok Banker and Sandhya Prabhat is a fun and fearless celebration of being brown, of being amazing, of being you! Written by 'India's epic storyteller', whose previous titles have sold over 3.2 million copies across 21 countries and 61 languages, this debut picture book is a stunningly-illustrated celebration of brown skin and of a child's right to be creative and free. Out in shops in March!

Ailsa Bathgate, Editorial Director, Barrington Stoke

I was profoundly moved by Gill Lewis's **Swan Song** (July) when I first read it. When Dylan is expelled from school for violent behaviour, his mother takes him to live with his grandfather in the Welsh village where she grew up. Relieved of the pressure to achieve at school, and immersed in the beauty of the natural world around him, Dylan starts to heal and reconnect with his family. Gill asks important questions about the stress that children face in the modern world as well as celebrating the valuable role of grandparents and the importance of our connection with nature.

Rosemarie Hudson, MD, HopeRoad

A King's Armour, set in the 16th century, against thrilling backdrops including the roofs of the Grand Bazaar of Istanbul, the canals of Venice and the court of Queen Elizabeth I, is a rich, satisfying and thrilling read. A mysterious manuscript arrives at the court of Sultan Murad III, apparently revealing the location of the fabled armour of King David. Murad summons the elite Ruzgār unit to track the lost treasure. The unit is made up many nationalities: warrior girl Awa of Songhai nobility; Will, the English boy; and the unit leader Polish Commander Konjic. A fantastic fast-paced historical adventure, with lots of excitement!

Lou John, Head of Reading at Home, Oxford Children's Books

In 2020 Pippi Longstocking turns 75. Or to be correct, the first book about Pippi turns 75 – she herself will always be nine years old. **Oxford Children's Books** and the **Astrid Lindgren Company** will celebrate 75 years of the strongest girl in the world with a wealth of exciting new publishing, including a flagship gift edition of the children's classic **Pippi Longstocking Goes Aboard**, illustrated with flair and humour by Lauren Child. We are delighted and excited to be publishing this title to celebrate the strong, kind, curious, anti-authoritarian and playful girl who makes extraordinary things happen.

Helen Carr, Senior Editor, The O'Brien Press

I'm so excited about our forthcoming YA fantasy novel **Queen of Coin and Whispers** by debut author Helen Corcoran. It centres on strong female characters and looks at class, loyalty and duty within the stylised court of Edar. I loved the vivid world-building and complex political scheming, but most of all, I loved getting to know Lia – the new queen trying to reform the corrupt kingdom she's inherited – and Xania – her spymaster with her own axe to grind. They are both women who know their own minds; as they work together their mutual respect – and attraction – grows. If you like books that blend beautiful writing, intrigue and romance, you'll love **Queen of Coin and Whispers**.

Hannah Dove, Editor, Ivy Kids

We are very excited to publish **Let's Save Our Planet: Forests**. This is the first title in a new series that will explore one of the most important issues for kids today – the environment. In the book, zoologist, CBBC presenter and writer Dr Jess French reveals how we can all work together to tackle the growing problem of deforestation. From showcasing different forest types and explaining the causes and effects of deforestation, to exploring innovative solutions (including robot tree-planters!) and inspiring readers to make a difference – this beautifully illustrated book does it all. It's both a love letter to trees, and an empowering call to action. We can't wait for readers to experience it.

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

Amid all the brilliant books from **Two Hoots** in 2020, the funniest is without doubt **Spaghetti Hunters** by the award-winning Morag Hood. Each of Morag's books is a perfect pocket of comedy, and this time she has surpassed herself. Spaghetti, Tiny Horse declares, is the trickiest of pastas, but armed with a fishing net and peanut butter, the hunt is on. When Duck turns to a recipe book instead, Tiny Horse is appalled: you can't just make spaghetti! I know it will have its young (and adult) readers in stitches.

Stephanie Barton, Publisher 0-6, Macmillan Children's Books

In 1980, Jill Murphy wrote and illustrated **Peace at Last**, followed by **Whatever Next** in 1984, both published by Macmillan. Jill's books feature the gently stoical Bear family and map the delights of their family life; the books are rightly considered classics. Forty years later, on the anniversary of the first book, Jill has written and illustrated a third book in the series: **One of Those Days**. We are stunned by what Jill has achieved in her new book; the text is assured, light and touching. Jill writes with joy and poignancy in equal measure; and the pictures are a rare thing indeed; unsurpassed and a showcase to her genius. Thanks must go to Justine Smith and Chris Inns at **Macmillan** who have worked with Jill on this book; truly, this is a new classic in the making.

Emma Jones, Editor at Penguin

Harrow Lake (August) is the most addictive, nerve-shredding book you'll read this year – it's pacy and smart with a killer twist. It's the creepiest book I've ever read, with all the hallmarks of the perfect compulsive thriller, and the villain Mister Jitters could genuinely rival Pennywise the clown for jump-scares. It's one of those books that unites people no matter their taste, because the minute you reach the end you're dying to talk to someone about it! A totally fresh and bold voice in YA, Kat Ellis has weaved a truly spectacular thriller, the *perfect* summer page-turner.

Shannon Cullen, Ladybird Publishing Director

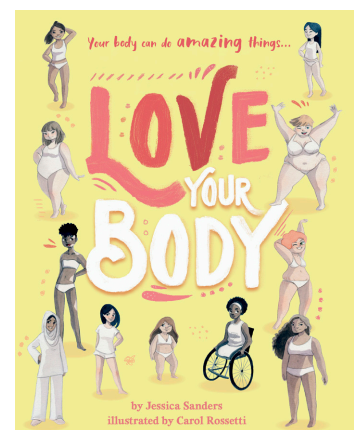
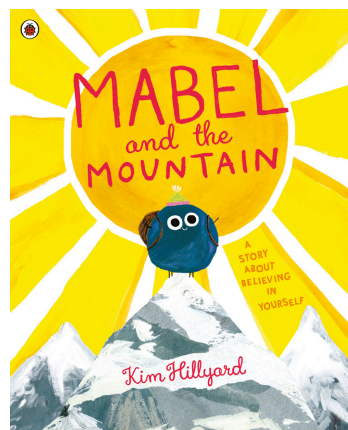
Sometimes a book comes along that speaks simultaneously to your heart and mind, and **Mabel and the Mountain: a story about believing in yourself** by Kim Hillyard is such a story. Kim is an entirely self-taught author-illustrator, and when I saw and read about the loveable Mabel – a determined fly who wants to climb to the top of a mountain, much to the disdain of her friends who think she should just fly – I immediately saw a story that would speak to children about their self-confidence. Believing in your ideas, however big or small and no matter what those around you say, is an important theme that Kim explores with warmth, humour and rich illustrations. I'm very excited to encourage our young readers to 'be more Mabel' in 2020!

Felicity Alexander, Senior Commissioning Editor, Piccadilly Press

We have some wonderful fiction coming from **Piccadilly Press** this year. One title we're particularly excited about is **Cloudburst** – Wilbur Smith's first book for children, written with co-author Chris Wakling. **Cloudburst** takes many of the themes that Wilbur's adult novels are best known for – rivalry, betrayal, fathers and sons – and weaves them into a gripping adventure story for 10+. Chris Wakling's background is in thrillers and travel writing, so he was the perfect fit to collaborate with Wilbur on this series, and we're really proud of the sharp pace and unpredictable plotting that's the result of these two different authors coming together.

Katie Haworth, Editorial Director, Templar

I'm incredibly excited by Julia Patton's new picture book **Number Seven Evergreen Street**. It's about (spoiler alert!) a little girl called Pea who saves her home from developers with help from her community and nature. I live in South London, and this story speaks to so many things I see happening in the city around me. What is especially special for me is that Julia has made each member of Pea's diverse, close-knit community an individual. This really feels like a story that will help children make sense of today's world with warmth and wit.





Katie Cotton, Publisher for Picture Books, Frances Lincoln Children's Books

From the moment I read **Love Your Body** by Jessica Sanders, illustrated by Carol Rossetti (March), I was captured by its warmth and honesty. The message that 'every body is a good body' is the perfect antidote to those maddening 'beach body ready' moments. In an age of rising eating disorders and social media bullying, this book teaches you to love your body not for what it looks like, but for what it can do. It is exactly what young girls (and some older ones, too) need to navigate today's increasingly image-obsessed world. We are so proud and excited to help bring this powerful book to market.

Naomi Colthurst, Commissioning Editor, Penguin

From the moment I started reading Hana Tooke's incredible debut story, I knew this was a book I had to acquire at all costs – and now, with only a few months to go until we publish **The Unadoptables**, I remain just as head over heels in love with it. It has all the ingredients of a classic children's book which will be read for generations. Not only is it brilliantly written, with tons of adventure playing out within the most atmospheric of settings, there's also so much humour and heart, and gorgeous details children will love poring over. Put simply, it is extraordinary.

Debbie Foy, Editor Director, Wren & Rook

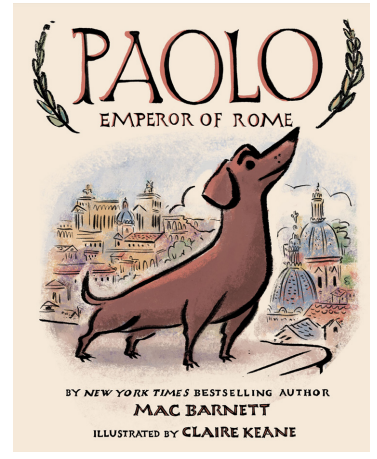
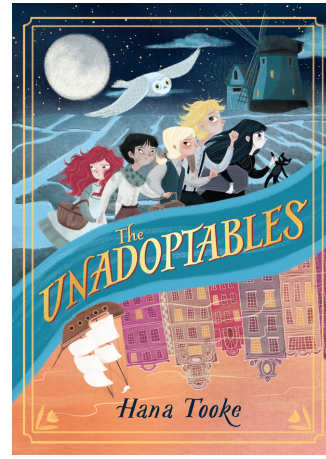
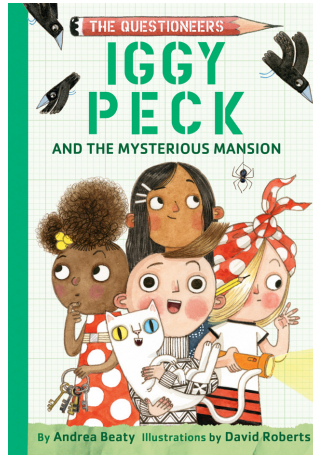
In September this year, we are thrilled to be publishing **Dare to Be You** by Matthew Syed, the much-anticipated follow up to our 2018 bestselling and award-winning **You Are Awesome**. **Dare to Be You** builds on some of the themes touched on in **You Are Awesome**, such as resilience, but introduces many more, including a deep dive into the power of diversity and diverse thinking. Told through anecdotes and stories of Matthew's life as a child and young adult, we learn that being true to yourself, celebrating your differences and following your own path is the way to build confidence and self-esteem in our rapidly changing and fast-paced world.

Sarah Lambert, Fiction Editorial Director, Orion Children's Books

We cannot wait to publish **The Strangeworlds Travel Agency** by LD Lapinski (April), a magical adventure that will take 9+ readers to whole new worlds. Packed with imagination and excitement, it stars 12-year-old Flick Hudson, who discovers the Strangeworlds Travel Agency where she finds hundreds of worlds just steps away from ours. All you have to do to visit them is jump into the right suitcase... But the world at the very centre of it all, a city called Five Lights, is in danger. Flick must race against time, travelling through uncharted worlds, to save it before it collapses into nothingness – and takes our world with it. From an amazingly talented debut author, this is sure to be a hit.

Victoria Rock, Founding Children's Publisher & Editor-at-Large at Chronicle Books

Combining the talents of **Newbery Medal** winner Patricia MacLachlan and rising illustration star Francesca Sanna, **My Friend Earth** (February) invites the very youngest of readers to celebrate the beauty of nature. Brimming with bold colours, this book is a magical ode to the many wonders of our planet with a subtle yet powerful environmental message. Patricia's texts are always a deceptively simple. Here, she's taken an age-old idea and offered an extremely child-friendly way to think about it. We wanted the look and feel of the book to be equally unique. Francesca's work shares the same sensibilities. It's a perfect partnership.



Erica Finkel, Editor at Abrams Books for Young Readers

As curious and determined as ever, the Questioneers are back in a new chapter book adventure from Andrea Beaty and David Roberts. **Iggy Peck and the Mysterious Mansion** (May) sees Ada Twist, Rosie Revere, Sofia Valdez and Iggy Peck working together to solve a strange mystery in an even stranger house, and it will take all of Iggy's architectural know-how – as well as the help from his fellow Questioneers – to save the day. This irresistible addition to the Questioneers series combines a Scooby-Doo-style caper with a haunted house, a missing ice cream baron and a sincere passion for STEM.

Erica Finkel, Editor, Amulet Books

A celebration of the Eternal City, **Paolo: Emperor of Rome** (March) tells the story of a daring dachshund who escapes from an indoor existence to live the sweet life on the streets of Rome. In a whirlwind tour he discovers all that the city has to offer: the ruins, the food, the art, the opera and – of course – the cats. Brought to life by Claire Keane's joyous illustrations, Mac Barnett's spirited and humorous voice is as enchanting as ever and will have everyone cheering on the bravery of this big-hearted dog who fights for honour, freedom and independence.

Nicola Carthy, Editor, Picture Books, Orchard Books

We are incredibly excited to be publishing a brand-new picture book from the bestselling, award-winning Lauren Child in September 2020. **The Goody** tells the tale of Chirton Krauss, who is a very good child indeed . . . until he starts to wonder what it might be like to be bad for once. This beautiful book teaches the importance of allowing children the freedom to be themselves. It's Lauren at her very best!

Susan Barba, New York Review Books

I am most excited to publish **Meet Monster** by Ann Cook and Ellen Blance, with illustrations by Quentin Blake. Gentle, playful, purple Monster is a newcomer to the city who in short order finds a home, a friend, and a neighbourhood that welcomes him in. First introduced in 1973, these emerging-reader stories were written by children (with Cook and Blance) for children. About our new omnibus edition, Blake says, 'I am delighted that Monster is out and about again as lively and beautifully coloured as ever, and making lots of new friends of all kinds.' I couldn't agree more!

Ellie Brough, Senior Editor, QED

Fake news has fast become a part of our everyday lives. It didn't just spring up overnight so where did it come from? **Fake News** (QED, August) looks at the concept of fake news and the media as a whole, laying out the history and facts to give young readers a greater understanding of the issue. By the end, kids will have the tools to make their own informed opinion on the subject. This is an exciting addition to the **What's the Issue** series and will be a great help when trying to navigate the modern media landscape.

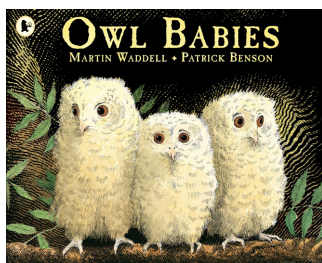
Emily Pither, Senior Editor, words & pictures

The Farm That Feeds Us (May) is a gentle introduction to how a small-scale, organic farm works and how farmers grow food for us to eat. This beautifully illustrated, non-fiction picture book takes a wider look at where our food comes from. We hope that it will help parents and teachers to develop children's knowledge and encourage conversations about food production, nature and how we can influence the methods of farming for a sustainable future.

Ten Essential Children's Books

For the last twenty years, each issue of **Books for Keeps** has included a *Ten of the Best* article, highlighting the ten best books on subjects as varied as World War I, human rights, the moon and ponies. In our 40th year, we are asking six authors to each choose ten books they consider essential to a child's library. First is **Philip Reeve**.

What makes a children's book 'essential'? I suppose the term suggests a deathless classic which will stand the test of time, like **The Wind in the Willows**, that spring from which so much of 20th century children's culture flows. But I don't want to assemble a list which consists entirely of 50 to 100-year-old titles I remember reading as a kid, so I've tried to aim for a mix of old and new favourites which I'd want to include if I were stocking a library.

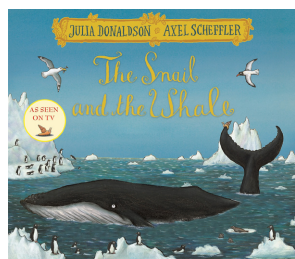


Owl Babies

Martin Waddell illus Patrick Benson, Walker Books, 978-0744531671, £6.99 pbk

Someone gave my son a copy of this little book when he was about three months old – way too young to understand stories, or so I thought. But I tried reading it to him anyway,

and although he obviously didn't know what a book was or what any of the words meant he knew something was up, and listened in a way that was different to the way he would listen if I'd just been talking to him. It's a beautiful piece of writing, so simple and spare, and so elegantly paced. The tension of the baby owls waiting worriedly for their mother to come home rises just to the point of making you a bit teary before you turn the page and it's released with 'And she came...' A perfect, snugly, cuddly bedtime book.



The Snail and the Whale

Julia Donaldson, illus Axel Sheffler, Macmillan Children's Books, 978-1509878826, £6.99 pbk

Julia Donaldson's picture books are so successful and ubiquitous that I think we're sometimes in danger of taking them for granted and forgetting just how good they are. The stories are charming, the jokes land, the

verse rhymes and scans, and Axel Sheffler's pictures are simple and colourful but also packed with the sort of well-observed detail that children love. I could have picked any of their many books together, but **The Snail and the Whale** was a particular favourite when my son was small.



There's a Shark in the Bath

Sarah McIntyre, Scholastic, 978-1407185439, £6.99 pbk

Conflict of interest alert! Sarah McIntyre is my friend and co-author. But the reason I started working with her is because I love her lively illustrations, her dry humour, and her understanding of the way kids think.

I regard every book she does as essential, but one of my favourites is **There's A Shark in the Bath**, the story of how little Dulcie copes with the family of hungry sharks which invades her bathroom. Despite their alarming size and massive, pointy teeth the sharks are too silly to be scary, and Dulcie easily distracts them with squirty toothpaste and festoons of loo-roll. A book full of the thrill of making a huge mess and then getting everything tidied away before the grown-ups find out.

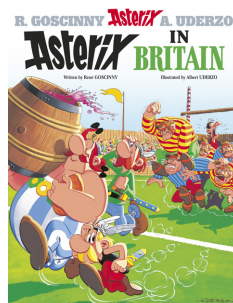


Bunny vs Monkey series

Jamie Smart, David Fickling Books, 978-1910200070, £8.99 pbk

Comics can be an important part of children's reading, and in recent years **The Phoenix** comic has built an excellent team of artists and writers. Many of the strips are now available as books, and there are several devoted to Jamie Smart's fantastic **Bunny vs Monkey**, all beautifully drawn and packed with hilarious and stupid jokes.

Bunny, his silly friends, and the mischievous, gadget-obsessed monkey who disrupts their woodland life have the anarchic energy of classic **Warner Brothers** cartoon characters, and they're cute and simple enough that kids love to draw them. Jamie Smart is a comic genius, and also a comics genius.

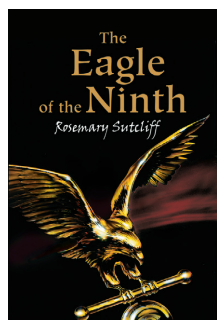


Asterix in Britain

René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo, Orion Children's Books, 978-0752866192, £7.99 pbk

I didn't have the benefit of **The Phoenix** when I was growing up, but I did have the Asterix books, the ongoing saga of a village of indomitable Gauls who hold off the might of the Roman Empire with the aid of their local druid's magic potion.

In the earliest books the drawing is a little cruder, in the later ones the stories can drag a bit or strain too hard for novelty, but in the middle there's a long run of near perfect ones, of which **Asterix in Britain** is a good example. The Britain which it gently spoofs – all Beatlemania, tea-breaks, and stiff-upper-lipped suburban chaps reading stone-tablet versions of the **Times** – was fading even when I read it in the '70s, but the drawings are magnificent, combining cartoonish humour with a real eye for historical detail, and the story (translated by the great Anthea Bell) bounces along, powered by the usual mix of friendship, slapstick violence and good-natured cultural stereotypes, with enough reversals to keep you rooting for our heroes till the last page (where it all ends, of course, with a huge feast).



The Eagle of the Ninth

Rosemary Sutcliff, Oxford, 978-0192753922, £8.99 pbk

I was fascinated by ancient history as a child, which may partly have been due to all those **Asterix** books. But it was probably more thanks to Rosemary Sutcliff, whose novels of Bronze Age, Roman, and Early Mediaeval Britain are so vividly written that I've been returning to them with pleasure ever since. The essential one (and my favourite as

a boy) is **The Eagle of the Ninth**, the story of a young Roman officer who arrives in Britain eager for military glory, is disabled by a crippling wound, and finds meaning instead on a lonely quest north of Hadrian's Wall, searching for the eagle standard of the lost Ninth Legion. It's a great adventure story, but it's much more than that – between the battle early on where Marcus is injured and the quest for the eagle there is a long and heartfelt section dealing with his recovery; the painful operations he endures, his bitterness and depression at finding himself an invalid, his cautious, slow-blooming friendships with a British girl and with his slave, Esca. Even as a child it was these parts that stayed with me, lending the adventure a weight that few adventures have. Rosemary Sutcliff's Roman Britain is clearly a product of the 1950s, and I believe later research has debunked the legend of the Ninth Legion, but that doesn't matter; **The Eagle of the Ninth** rings true.



The God Beneath the Sea

Edward Blishen and Leon Garfield, illus Charles Keeping, Doubleday, 978-0857533111, £12.99 pbk

A grounding in myths and legends is one of the best things you can give a child; apart from being great stories in their own right, they are the key to so much of art and literature.

The God Beneath the Sea retells the stories of the Greek gods, their war with the Titans, the creation of human beings, Prometheus,

Persephone, weaving all the strands into a continuous narrative which reads like a novel. It is full of cruelty and wonder (the opening image is of a blazing baby falling out of heaven), the writing is brilliant, and every one of Charles Keeping's eerie illustrations is a masterpiece. It's one of the great children's books (and it has a great sequel, **The Golden Shadow**, which deals with the Labours of Heracles).



Northern Lights

Philip Pullman, Scholastic, 978-1407130224, £7.99 pbk

There's a clear through-line from **The God Beneath the Sea** to Philip Pullman's **His Dark Materials**; another story woven out of myths by another author who, like Blishen and Garfield, like Rosemary Sutcliff, respects children enough to talk to them frankly about serious things. The later books in the trilogy move between several different

worlds, including our own, but my favourite is **Northern Lights** because it stays in one world, both familiar and utterly strange, and sketches it so clearly and yet so economically that within a few pages you feel as if you've lived there all your life. Like C.S. Lewis's Narnia books or Tolkien's **The Lord of the Rings**, it is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand 20th Century British fantasy, or who just likes a really good story.

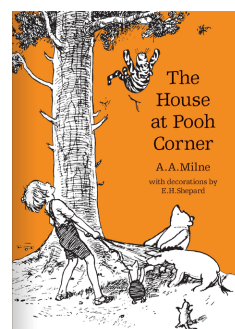


The White Darkness

Geraldine McCaughrean, Oxford, 978-0192726186, £7.99 pbk

Geraldine McCaughrean is another author who has never written an inessential book. Her children's books – all adventure stories, all different, all wonderful – are written with the wonder of a child and the wisdom of a very thoughtful grown-up. Her adult novels were the spark that set me writing. **The White Darkness** is as close to adult (or

Young Adult) as her children's novels come, a strange, unsettling, utterly gripping story about a shy, partially deaf girl whose eccentric uncle drags her off on a hallucinatory quest across Antarctica. The prose shimmers with perfectly chosen words and brilliant metaphors, but is never flashy, and doesn't distract from the extravagant twists and switchbacks of the page-turning plot.



Winnie the Pooh The House at Pooh Corner

A.A. Milne, illus E.H. Shephard, Egmont, 978-1405280846, £14.99 hbk

I tried to start this list with books for younger readers and progress to books for older ones, but I think **Winnie the Pooh** works just as well for both. Pooh and his friends and their adventures in their small, safe world are instantly appealing to children, but the adults reading them aloud will recognise

Rabbit's pomposity, Eeyore's passive-aggressive gloominess and Owl's immense but slightly flimsy gravitas for the wry character studies that they are. They'll also recognise that the books' theme is childhood innocence and its passing. So many of the incidents and lines of dialogue are clearly based on things the real Christopher Robin said or did; they shine like captured sunlight. My son used to laugh so hard at some of the funny bits that we had to go back and read them over and over again (not bad for jokes that are almost a century old) but he probably didn't understand why I was always in floods of tears when I read the final page of **The House at Pooh Corner**.

Finally, whatever you like...

The most essential book of all is the one that a child loves. It might be one of those I've mentioned, but it's just as likely to be one I haven't read, or haven't even heard of it. It could be a classic picture book, but it could also be something by an unknown author, picked up at a supermarket. It could be a comic. It could be a car manual, or a book about football. It might be written by a revered author, worshipped by her peers, her career garlanded with awards and critical acclaim. It might be written by David Walliams. What makes it essential is that, while the child is reading it, and for as long as it lives in their minds, it expands their world a little, or frees them from worry or boredom, or makes them laugh, and makes them want to read more, see more, know more. Just about *every* book is essential to somebody



Philip Reeve is the author of **Mortal Engines**, recently adapted for the screen by Peter Jackson. He has written many other works, including **Railhead**, **Here Lies Arthur**, and a series of popular books for younger readers with the illustrator Sarah McIntyre.

Authorgraph

No.240

Ross MacKenzie

Interviewed by
Jane Sandell

You might have thought that with a new book about to hit the shelves, Ross MacKenzie would be taking it easy and enjoying the anticipation. But he is already editing the sequel, something readers of **Evernight** will be very glad to hear. Inspired by Victorian London and his love of Dickens' novels, Ross created the world of **Evernight** after reading **London Labour and the London Poor** by Henry Mayhew, a contemporary of Charles Dickens. Mayhew's book, Ross says, fleshed out Dickens' world for him and it was in it that he came across a description of a 'tosher' and decided he had to write about one.



In fact, two of the main characters in **Evernight** are toshers, that is people who scour the underground sewers for valuables to sell on. They are amongst the poorest and least considered in a society firmly segregated by class. So far, so recognisable. But this is not Victorian London; it is King's Haven in the Silver Kingdom, infiltrated long ago, after a witches' schism, by Mrs Hester and still ruled by her and her witchcraft.

Ross is no stranger to creating alternative worlds. His first book, **Zac and the Dream Pirates**, plunged his hero into a perturbing land on the other side of sleep, peopled by vampires, werewolves and other creatures who try to rob him of sleep. From there he moved on to **The Nowhere Emporium**, about a mysterious shop that appears without warning and lures customers into its vast labyrinth of departments. Both of these books won the **Scottish Children's Book Award**, a huge excitement for their author and their small publishers. But something even bigger was lurking around the corner.

To say that Ross was flabbergasted when he heard that **The Nowhere Emporium** had been shortlisted for the **Blue Peter Book Award** would be to massively understate the case. There he was in the company of Frank Cottrell Boyce and Lara Williams waiting to see if 200 children would judge his book to be the best. A few months later, in a hotel room in Aberdeen, he received a text from Suzanne Kennedy, his editor at Edinburgh-based Floris Books, asking, 'Are you sitting down?' He was, but not for long as the news that he had won the **Blue Peter Book Award** set him jumping around the room. He is clearly still excited by the memory of being given the award by the then Children's Laureate Chris Riddell live on **Blue Peter**; and, of course, he cherishes his Blue Peter badge!

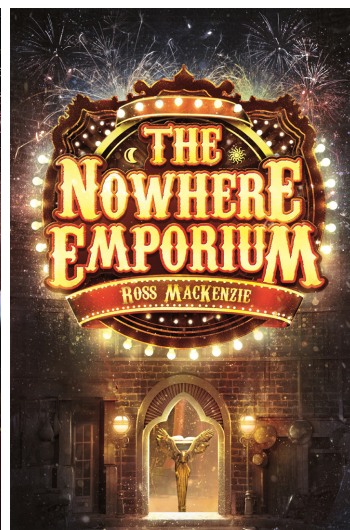
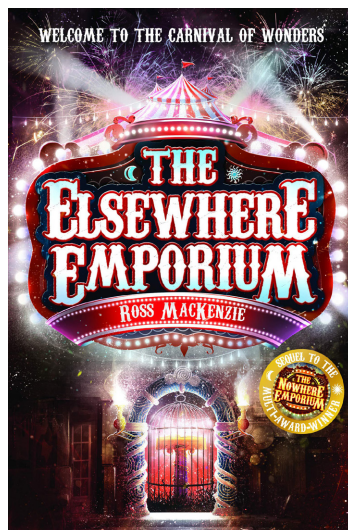
It might have all been so different had it not been for his wife Aileen. She made a deal with him: she'd buy him a new laptop for Christmas if he would promise to finish a book and send it to a



publisher. At that point, Ross had completed none of his projects, but he knew he wanted to write. He and Aileen shook on the deal and one year on **Zac and the Dream Pirates** was on its way to Chicken House to be retrieved later from the slush pile by Barry Cunningham.

Evernight is such an accomplished piece of writing that it is difficult to believe that it is only Ross's fifth book. Between **The Nowhere Emporium** and its sequel **The Elsewhere Emporium**, Floris published **Shadowsmith**, a stand-alone novel featuring a boy whose family is being torn apart, a weird girl in a yellow raincoat and some ancient malevolent spirits. **Evernight** builds on the themes explored in these earlier works but its world and characters are totally unique. Mrs Hester's ambitions and cruelty know no bounds; she will achieve world domination no matter the cost to other people – even if it means unleashing the Evernight Spell. The White Witches are enslaved by the removing of their souls, the Westerly Witches are clinging on precariously to the small amount of land left to them and the members of the Doomsday Coven, guardians of all that is good, have perished at the hands of the mysterious Shadow Jack.

While inhabiting our world, rather than some fantastical place of his imagination, Ross MacKenzie lives in Renfrew, a sometime shipbuilding town on the banks of the rivers Clyde and Cart. He's a Renfrew man born and bred and has happy memories of his childhood there. He spent his time creating comics and picture books until a single event turned him into a reader at the age of nine. His teacher that year was Miss McLean who, in common with good teachers everywhere, read aloud to the class. Her rendition of **The Witches** by Roald Dahl flicked the reading switch for Ross. Suddenly he was devouring books, mostly borrowed from his local library where his Dad took him every week. He still remembers those trips to the library fondly, the walk there full of anticipation and excitement. He's reminded of it as he takes his daughters Selina and Mollie to the same library to allow them to explore other worlds for themselves.



At the same time he started reading, he began to write because, he says, he wanted to make people feel the way he had felt on hearing **The Witches**. His passion for stories is undimmed and he finds the best of them more real than life. He is, he says, informed and influenced by what he reads. As a teenager he discovered Terry Pratchett's books and tried to write like him 'so hard that it hurt'. These days he's an eclectic reader and although all his own books could be described as fantasies that is only because they are the stories that have shouted loudest in his head and made the biggest claims on his imagination. Other and different tales are waiting their turn.

Some of the characters in **Evernight** appeared fully formed in his mind. Ross knew right from the start, for example, that Larabelle Fox, the strong female lead, was black and is keen to refute any suggestions of tokenism. Her mixed-race heritage, he tells me, will be a significant plot line in the next book. Joe, the young tosher she befriends and tries to protect, sprang out of his head already destined to develop and play a significant role. More worryingly the terrifyingly evil Mrs Hester also walked straight onto the page in the company of Shadow Jack.

Evernight is a classic example of the good versus evil school of story. But it is more complicated than that. Shadow Jack for example presents the reader with a dilemma, and it is easy to empathise with Joe's positive response to him. And, although the Westerly Witches fall fully on the side of good, they are far from perfect. Though a fantasy story, **Evernight** could also be read as an allegory on social history or politics. Above all though, it is brimming with adventure, mystery and discovery, and full of characters with complex motivations and emotions. As for Ross, he hopes it will be a story that carries its readers to another time and place, and stays with them long after the book has been closed. And I feel sure that it will.

Books mentioned

Evernight, Andersen Press, 978-1783448319, £7.99 pbk

The Elsewhere Emporium, Kelpies, 978-1782505198, £6.99 pbk

The Nowhere Emporium, 978-1782501251, Kelpies, £7.99 pbk

Shadowsmith, Kelpies, 978-1782503040, £6.99 pbk

Zac and the Dream Pirates, Chicken House, O/P



Jane E Sandell is a children's book specialist, reviewing, writing and enthusing about books and authors.

Windows into illustration: Ken Wilson-Max

Ken Wilson-Max is an award-winning author and illustrator. His books include **Where's Lenny?**, **Lenny and Wilbur**, **Max Paints the House** and most recently **Astro Girl** and **The Drum** and **The Flute**. Born in Zimbabwe, he now lives in London. Ken is mentoring young illustrators as part of the Pathways programme into children's publishing and was in the list of Breaking New Grounds British writers and illustrators of colour. In 2017 he became publisher at Alanna Max Books, aiming to continue refining his inclusive approach alongside talented creators. Here he describes his approach to creating books for the very young.



Working with pre-school children means leaving one's ego at the door and being prepared to do whatever it takes to help them understand and enjoy. The more open you can be, the better. Books like mine capture the little moments between people that I always hope young children will recognise. To achieve this, I have to observe how children and their parents or siblings are with each other. If I can sketch, I will do so, but it's not always possible. So instead I try to remember the feelings, sounds and sometimes smells that I notice. I use those to make sketches.

Being in the best mood possible before starting helps. You can't make positive images without feeling that way yourself. This isn't always easy or quick, so I normally work on it while brainstorming and sketching.



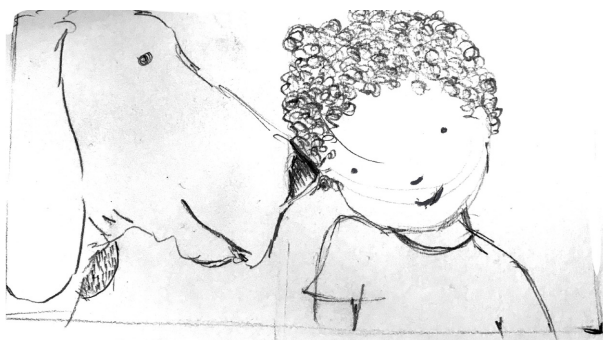
In **Lenny and Wilbur**, I wanted the readers to recognise the friendship between the two. The **Lenny** series is about emotions and the feelings in between the words. The texts are always sparse, so the images have to do a lot of the storytelling.

I make a storyboard in pencil first, then another one using a brush pen, both in a small sketchbook. This can go on for a few rounds before they are scanned and further manipulated in Photoshop. If the image is 'right' at that small size it only needs to be enlarged and used as a base for the final piece.

Then I start to experiment with colour and texture. Characters like Lenny always have to be the same. No variations! It sounds obvious, but when the work is printed, skin colours are affected by all the other colours on the image.

Once the storyboard has been amended and approved, it's time to paint. This is the time when the right mood makes or breaks the illustration.

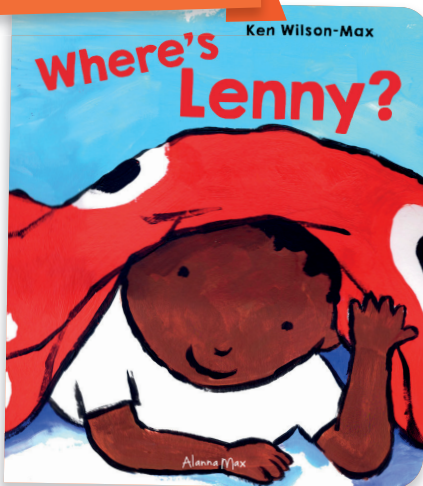
I prefer sketching as much as possible and doing the final art pieces once, with lots of positive energy. Colours are definitely what they should be, and paint is laid on thick so brush strokes can be seen (and felt). I try to keep the colour palette simple, but the thick black lines help to keep some harmony if that doesn't work. Lately I've been loosening the paint strokes which I find gives the images more energy, but I haven't found another technique that brings out feelings as well as this way.



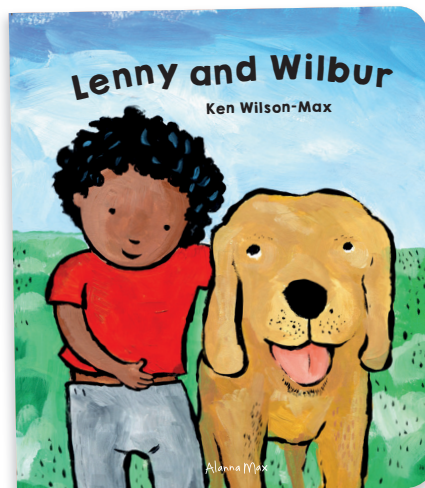


Where's Lenny 978-1-907825-248 and **Lenny and Wilbur** 978-1-907825-248 both £7.99 hdbk are published by Alanna Max
Astro Girl is published by Otter-Barry Books, 978-1910959213. £11.99 hbk.

Coming this spring

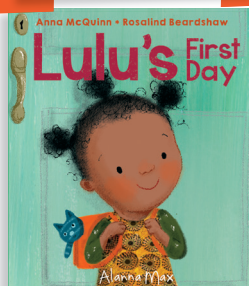


Where's Lenny?
 ISBN: 978-1-907825-248

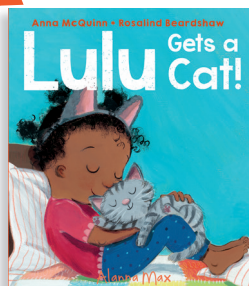


Lenny and Wilbur
 ISBN: 978-1-907825-248

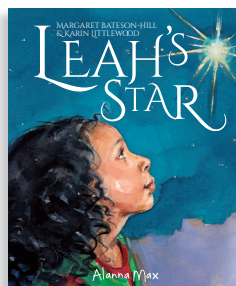
Out now!



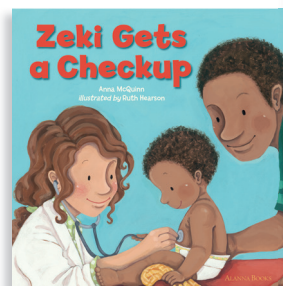
ISBN: 978-1-907-825-217



ISBN: 978-1-907-825-170



ISBN: 978-1-907-825-255



ISBN: 978-1-907-825-200



Our books are naturally inclusive & diverse, reflecting a life that anyone can relate to.

Visit www.alannamax.com for more information about what's in store for 2020, or contact Fay@alannamax.com

Everyone loves a good story!

Picturebooks: the best art form for something you have to say

Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling was published in 2012, winning the **United Kingdom Literacy Association Academic Book Award** the following year. Since then, the children's picturebook has continued to evolve and grow as an art form and indeed in the new edition of the book authors **Martin Salisbury** and **Morag Styles** argue that we are currently enjoying a new golden age of children's picturebooks. In this extract from the book, they examine the increasing phenomenon of picturebooks as a medium of communication for all ages, and their ability to convey the most sophisticated messages, and also discuss **The Journey** with its creator Francesca Sanna.

Man's inhumanity to man

There are three ways of writing for children...the third way, which is the only one I could ever use myself, consists in writing a children's story because a children's story is the best art form for something you have to say. C.S. Lewis

Very different approaches to the broad subject of wars and racial tension can be seen in Armin Greder's award-winning **The Island** (first published in Germany by Saurlander Verlag in 2002 as **Die Insel**) and David McKee's **The Conquerors** (Andersen Press, 2004) and **Tusk Tusk** (Andersen Press, 1978).

The Island offers a bleak view of mankind's propensity to be influenced by a lynch mob mentality.

With limited use of colour and dark that are reminiscent of the work of Honoré Daumier, Greder creates an island world that is turned upside down by the arrival of a naked, wretched-looking man, washed up on the shore. What possible harm can this sorry figure cause? But gradually he becomes a focus of blame; a convenient scapegoat for all the islanders' ills and fears. Mothers use him as the bogeyman with which to threaten their children if they don't eat their food. **The Island** plots the gradual spread of suspicion and fear of someone different. It is a bleak book that offers no hope in the form of a traditional happy ending, but its universal message is powerfully conveyed.

The recent surge in small, independent studio publishers has facilitated the arrival of a greater number of picturebooks that tackle subject matter not traditionally deemed suitable for children. André Letria and his Lisbon-based studio, Pato Lógico, is one such. **A Guerra (The War)** was published in 2018. A collaboration between André and his father, the writer José Jorge Letria, the book is a timely, powerful and unrelentingly dark sixty-four-page statement on the tragedy of war.

In **The Conquerors** and **Tusk Tusk**, David McKee takes a much gentler look at man's apparent perennial need to invade and conquer his neighbours' territories. McKee's approach is a more typical, less direct Anglo-Saxon one than Greder's, using humour and irony to tackle equally serious material. **The Conquerors** is a beautifully understated book that tells the tale of a small nation that, rather than engaging in war, prefers to devote its time to culture in the form of storytelling, singing songs and quietly celebrating its heritage. Its larger and aggressively expansionist neighbour, led by the stereotypical medal-strewn general, continually invades the nation but somehow never conquers it. The invading soldiers are greeted quietly, told stories and sung to; eventually they have such a good time that, before they know it, they themselves are being conquered with culture and charm. The book sends a profound message with effortless elegance.

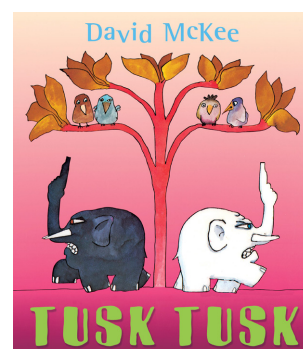
Although McKee's **Tusk Tusk** is a small picturebook that features apparently simple, sweet, stylized elephants set against a colourful

jungle background, its themes are hatred, racism, war, violence, difference and outsiders. It is designed and marketed for a young audience, but McKee offers a no-holds-barred view of some of the worst aspects of humanity. The Eden-like existence of the elephants in a land bursting with gorgeous vegetation soon ends as the black elephants hate the white elephants and vice versa. Trunks turn into guns, and war and killing ensue until the environment is laid waste

and the peace-loving elephants are left no choice but to hide in the depths of the forest. Decades later, as the land once more bursts into beautiful life, grey elephants appear, the progeny of their peace-loving forebears. The reader believes McKee will provide a happy ending after all, but the final sentence in the book is: 'But recently the little ears and the big ears have been giving each other strange looks.' McKee is not afraid to challenge children. He is better known for the gentler elephant series **Elmer**, but it is worth pointing out that even here the hero is multicoloured and multicultural.

Already much respected as an illustrator, Pam Smy's debut authorial work, **Thornhill** (2017), breaks out of many of the perceived boundaries and definitions of word-image relationships in children's literature. It is a dual narrative told by the main protagonists, through pictures in one case and written diary entries in the other. Although it is a bleak Gothic ghost story with disturbing themes of loss, loneliness, mutism, neglect and bullying, and there is certainly no conventional happy ending, friendship and kindness also feature at its heart. Unusually, and most welcome, all the significant characters in this book are girls or women. The darkness of the tale is emphasized not only through chilling imagery in Smy's powerful illustrations – a haunted house, tangled creepers, crows, spiders, creepy puppets, barbed wire – but also by the number of completely black spreads that close each chapter. Using flat layers of emulsion paint with black acrylic ink on top, Smy, through her publishers, David Fickling Books, has produced a beautifully designed doorstep of a book that asks a lot of its readers, not least to contemplate the deep unhappiness of its central child characters and the inability of the adults around them to intervene and save them from harm.

The volatile political and environmental times in which we live are increasingly reflected in the content of picturebooks. One political and social issue that has come to the fore over recent years is that of human migration. With graphic scenes of the misery and tragedy of displacement played out repeatedly on our television screens, children will inevitably be exposed to the issue. Sadly, many will have direct experience of it. Picturebook-makers have become increasingly emboldened to tackle such subjects.





A conversation with Francesca Sanna

The Journey is a masterclass in the mechanics of picturebook-making. Just as rhythm, meter and patterns of regular and irregular 'pulses' lead us, often invisibly, through a poem, the visual cadence of Sanna's sequence of images is meticulously crafted to maximize our engagement with the trauma of the family's experience. The overall left-to-right direction of the journey is punctuated by meetings with right-to-left obstacles and hazards. Rich combinations of complementary colour are used with great skill. Visual metaphor abounds but is used subtly to represent the incipient arrival of war or the flight to freedom. Sanna also explains that the book contains many personal motifs and references – her mother, the library, her cat, flamingos from Sardinia. Like many picturebook-makers, she has the opportunity to work with children in schools and says that she is delighted to see how the children 'get' the metaphor of the bird.

In terms of process, how are the images created?

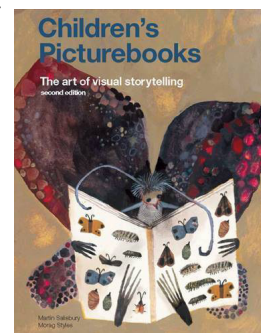
'The images are all constructed digitally. I make marks on paper in the planning and, yes, I have experience of printmaking – screen printing and lithography. But the process now is digital. I work out the overall colour structure from the start.'

At the time of our conversation, Sanna was working on a new project, taking the research element of her work further through a collaborative project in the form of a research fellowship with a well-known British university, developing a follow-up to **The Journey**. The research looks at the concept of integration and 'acceptance'. Sanna has taken this research into schools and made contact with immigrant children in different cultures. She has also delved into the historical context of the subject. This work takes the picturebook to a new level of social and political relevance. Does she see herself as a picturebook-maker who will always make work that has a political edge?

'Yes to being a picturebook-maker. I see myself as a sequential narrative thinker. No to always making work that is political. It can be too 'heavy' and I am scared of making mistakes. There is a weight of responsibility. But it is a positive thing to open up discussion about these things with children. And I love to express ideas in a personal way, from personal experience. But I need to become a better businessperson!'

The huge international success of **The Journey** has helped to open the door for makers and publishers to address some of the most important issues of our time through the medium of the picturebook.

Children's Picturebooks Second Edition: The Art of Visual Storytelling
by Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles,
Laurence King Publishing,
978-1786275738, £29.99 pbk.



Beautifully illustrated non-fiction and picture books from Laurence King

1 to 20 Animals Aplenty
Katie Viggers

Bob goes POP!
Marion Denchairs

Children's Picturebooks Second Edition: The Art of Visual Storytelling
Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles

LAURENCE KING

laurenceking.com/childrens
Follow us on Twitter: @LKPCChildrens
Find us on YouTube: Laurence King Publishing
Find us on NetGalley

Knights of

The publisher doing things differently

In case you haven't realised, **Knights Of** is the publisher intent on doing things differently. The company was created in late 2017, and born out of frustration. Founders David Stevens and Aimée Felone were then both working at a major UK publishing house, he as creative director, she as assistant editor, and both had clear ideas about the way publishing needs to move in the 21st century. Finding little support in house and feeling painted into a corner, David handed in his notice. Aimée followed him two months later and together they drafted a business plan for a publishing company with inclusivity as its driving force.

They took their pitch-deck to investors and raised the seed capital they needed in just three weeks – 'terrifyingly fast' says David. There is always a long gap between the 'I'm in' moment and money actually appearing in the bank account but they reckon the foundations of the company were formed in that time: 'With no real work as such, it was basically six months of Aimée and I sitting at a small desk and asking each other questions,' says David, 'But it meant that even now, three years later, we can act as one mind.' One of their first and most defining decisions was that they wouldn't work quietly or behind the scenes. 'Our approach was very much, look, if this is going to effect the change we want, then let's be transparent from the beginning,' says David. They launched with no books – radical! – but a focus on who they were and what they wanted to achieve. 'A big part of why **Knights Of** works is because people know our faces,' says Aimée, 'We wanted people to know who we were so that we could establish and maintain a level of accessibility. Anyone can message us at any time – that's across the board from submissions to sales enquiries to potential job positions.'

The approach paid off and not because it so quickly established them as a force in the market: it also brought them their most commercially successful book to date. One of the people who approached them through the website with an idea for a book was Sharna Jackson. 'Sharna had time off before the start of a new job to write a book and wanted to know if we'd consider it,' says David, 'We sat down for an afternoon – she presented three potential ideas, we liked one and commissioned it.' That was **High-Rise Mystery**, a junior crime drama set in a London estate and starring young sleuths Nik and Norva. The book has received huge support from independent booksellers and Waterstones, has thousands of eager readers, and is now set to become a series.

Equally important to them, for sales and profile, is million-selling US author Jason Reynolds. Aimée had been aware of Jason and his books for a while and was perplexed as to why he wasn't published in the UK. They bought **For Every One** – though 'technically it's not a children's book' – published it in October 2018 and brought Jason to the UK on tour, something which proved crucial: 'Jason fell in line and behind and in love with the entire ethos of the company,' explains David, 'He told us the thing that everyone is trying to do in the US is happening right here in the UK in that there is a legitimate shift in how this company is put together and what we're trying to do around commercial fiction.' Jason alerted them to the fact that rights were available for his **Tracks** series. By this time, other UK publishers had woken up to Jason, and David and Aimée found themselves in a bruising competition for the books. They thought they had little chance of getting the deal: 'We were two books in, less than a year old and had absolutely no sales track record, but what we did have was a vision for **Knights Of** and a team that



didn't look like anyone else. Jason was offered five maybe ten times what we were offering.' They were told by competitors that they'd lost the books – 'But they didn't appreciate how incredibly stubborn and driven Jason is'. He wanted to publish with **Knights Of**, and the four books in the series, known in the UK as **Run**, are now in their catalogue.

Three years after their launch, the team has grown to five: Eishar Brar is their editorial director, Daphne Lao Tonge their marketing director, and Marssaié is creative director. Oh, and last year they opened a bookshop too **Round Table Books** began life as a pop-up shop in Brixton in 2018, a hands-on opportunity in that nail-biting time of year for publishers when the books are stacked up in Christmas displays, and all you can do is wait for them to sell. It was also a direct response to the **CLPE Reflecting Realities** report that revealed only 4% of children's books published in 2017 featured BAME characters, and only 1% had a BAME main character. 'We thought let's turn this into something positive,' says Aimée, 'Let's celebrate and champion the books that do exist.'

Such was the response from the community, they were soon talking about ways to make it permanent. They raised £50,000 via crowdfunding and the shop is now open six days a week, the editorial team working from a small table screened off at the back. Overhearing customer conversations is a reminder everyday of the importance of what they are doing: 'It's almost become our slogan' says Aimée, 'Characters that look like me on the cover' but it's something that we hear every day – we see kids running over to books and picking them up, and we see parents' emotional responses when their five year olds say, 'Look it's me'.

For 2020 they're determined that there'll be no new initiatives, instead it will be consolidation, a concentration on their books and profitability: 'This year has to be the year where we prove we can do all the things we promised we could do to our authors, and to our team' says David, 'This has to be the year where we grow up. We're not a big operation but the thought of it stopping scares the life out of me. If we're going to make the change we want to make, we need to be here for years to come.'

With the drive, commitment and accessibility they've demonstrated so far, expect **Knights Of** to be ringing changes for some time yet.

Find out more, including how to invest, on their website knightsof.media

A House Without Walls:

an interview with Elizabeth Laird

Elizabeth Laird is known for writing stories set in the third world where children's lives can sometimes be extremely tough and their futures uncertain. **A House Without Walls**, published last year but now out in paperback, is no exception. It follows the life of twelve-year-old Safiya after she is forced from her comfortable home in Syria to end up living in a refugee tent-city in neighbouring Jordan. **Nicholas Tucker** discussed the book with Elizabeth for **Books for Keeps**.

When I spoke to her I told the author that I approached this novel with some trepidation, fearing it might turn out to be almost unbearably tragic.

But I approached it with trepidation too! It's the hardest thing I have ever written. I have met many refugee families in Jordan and have always been struck by their hospitality and general niceness. For me, they are an example of the human spirit at its best in the way they retain their sense of family and all the mutual bonds within it. And how they manage to make the best of what could otherwise seem a terrible situation. But trying to get this across to young readers lacking this sort of first-hand knowledge was not easy.

Safiya has no mother and while Baba, her father, is a nice enough man he is still an unquestioning believer in women staying at home and doing all the domestic work. His daughter is therefore unable to go to school, but she loves her father all the same. How did you feel about him?

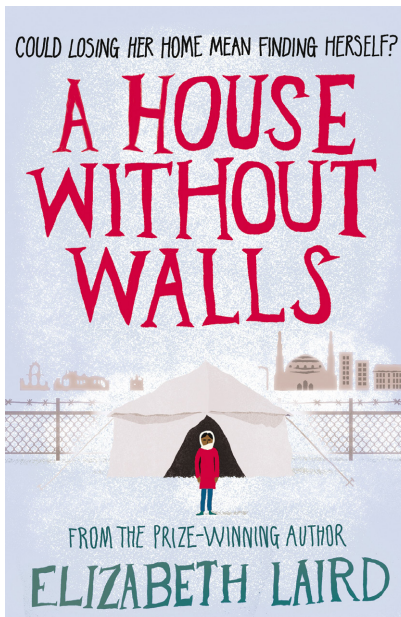
Well, he wasn't an easy character, having to operate within the patriarchal norms of his own society. But I respected him deeply for preserving his humanity and by the end found that I loved him too.

Safiya, who tells this story, describes her normal adolescent highs and lows so vividly it is sometimes possible to forget about the challenging physical problems she also has to cope with.

When I was at the Azraq refugee camp in Jordan I spoke to the teachers there, who were also Syrian refugees, on what they thought were the main preoccupations of their students. I expected them to say something like 'They are frightened of the bombs'. And indeed there were sometimes bombers going overhead as we spoke. But they said their pupils were most worried about their body images, plus the usual business of making and sometimes breaking friendships. They also bated bullies in the classroom and quarrels within the family. And I thought, these are typical kids! And a teenage girl is a teenage girl! This gave me the confidence to make Safiya a recognisable teenager despite living in a tent and having to survive rain, mud and cold. There is also a sub-plot involving her finally meeting a long-lost twin sister Saba, who now lives with a rich family and initially looks down on her refugee sister. But perhaps readers might wonder whether they too would have felt the same way suddenly faced by a new relative coming from a very deprived background and think about that.

What were you doing out in those refugee camps?

I was in Germany for a holiday and one night I visited Munich railway station. When the train came in I saw a small refugee family get out, looking completely exhausted. The German police, who were wonderful, shepherded them into an enclosure where there was warmth and food. And on the walls were slogans written by German children welcoming them to their country! It was so moving it made



me cry. And also made me determined to do something myself while the rest of Britain was doing absolutely nothing. I soon got to hear that the Norwegian Refugee Council was looking for a British author to do courses involving stories for refugees so of I went!

Victorian books about waifs and strays sometimes ended up asking their readers to send a donation to a suitable charity. You do the same here, picking out the charity **Helping Refugees** in Jordan. What sort of response have you had?

I've had sponsored walks, bake sales, even pocket money! It's been very heart-warming.

Any more books about refugee children to come?

*I've written two based on my experience in Jordan with **Welcome to Nowhere** and now this one. But I have found writing them very taxing and I feel I have gone to that particular well with my bucket often enough. So I'm going to have a pause before I decide what to do next.*

There are no signs of exhaustion in either of these fine novels, both so well written they practically read themselves. Liz is now four years away from eighty but youthful in every other way. Already a multiple prize-winner, whatever she does next will be worth waiting for. Meanwhile **A House Without Walls** should be on every reading list, young or older. It's that good.

A House Without Walls, Elizabeth Laird, Macmillan Children's Books 978-150982824, £6.99 pbk



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

Beyond the Secret Garden: A Sporting Chance

January is the month when many people are thinking about sport and exercise as part of their New Year's Resolutions. So **Darren Chetty** and **Karen Sands-O'Connor** kick off this Olympic year with a column about sports and children's books.

2019 was an interesting year for fiction with a sports theme. The list of nominated books for the 2020 Carnegie Medal includes books that use sport as a major plot device, and some of these are by or about people of colour. It can be illuminating to take a look at the way sport is has been used in books about people of colour over the years.

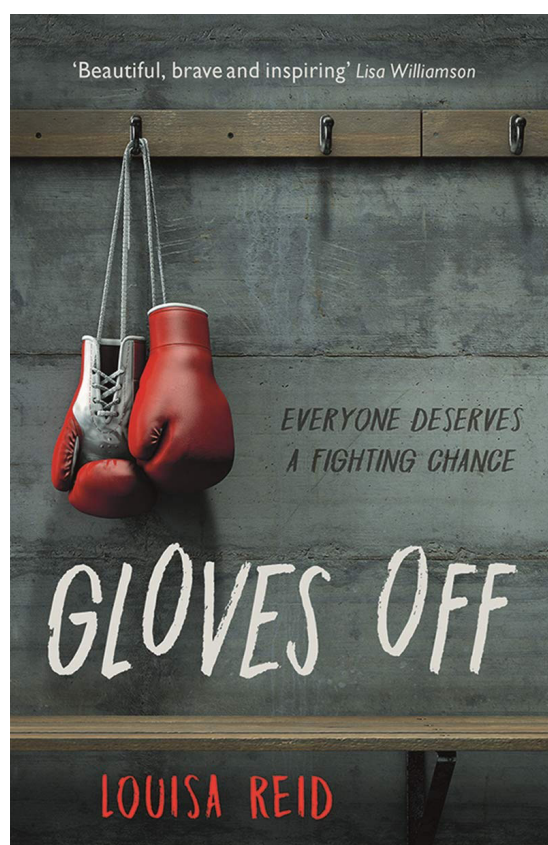
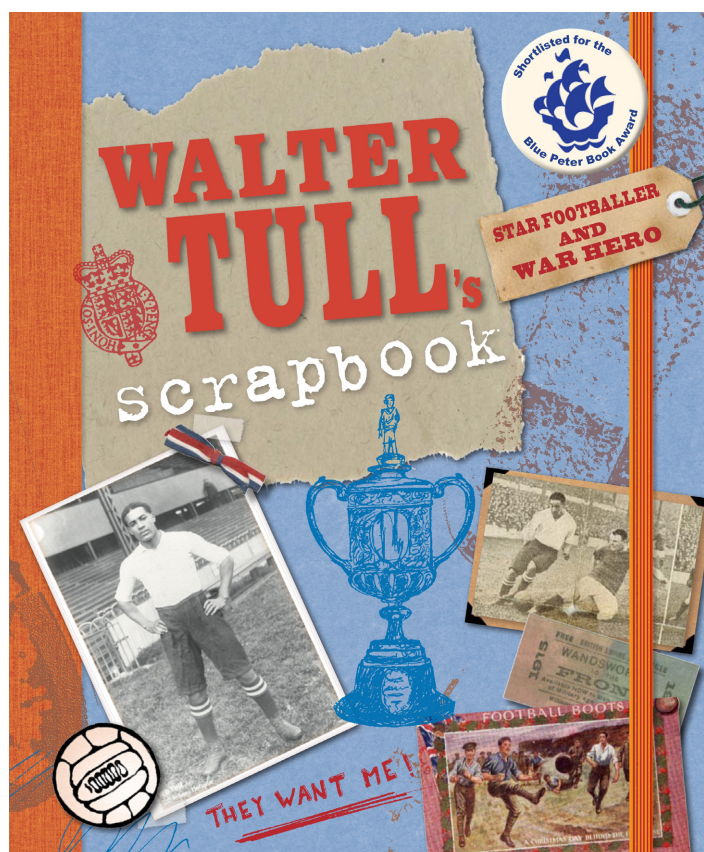
In Britain, people of colour have been participating in British professional and semi-professional sport for well over a hundred years. Footballers like Walter Tull were playing before World War I. Thanks largely to the research of Phil Vasili, books for children such as **Walter Tull's Scrapbook** by Michaela Morgan (Lincoln 2013), and Dan Lyndon and Roger Wade Walker's **Walter Tull: Footballer, Soldier, Hero** (Collins 2011) appeared over the past decade. However, sportspeople of colour were largely ignored in British children's literature until relatively recently.

Fictional depictions of contemporary Black or Asian Britons as part of team sports were also rare; Tony Drake's **Playing it Right** (1979) depicted both Black and Asian players on a school cricket team (and included themes of social class and racism into a lively narrative) and Gillian Cross's **Swimathon!** (1986) featured a Black British girl as part of a school swim team, but these were the exceptions rather than the rule. Interestingly, some children's nonfiction about team sports continue to ignore British-born players of colour; the 2017

Fantastic Footballers: 40 Inspiring Icons, for example, features only Didier Drogba and Paul Pogba as Black icons playing on British teams.

More common historically was the sports story about the character of colour using an individual sport, such as boxing, to find a way to fit in to or survive in British society. Sport gave a character a chance to be seen, and thus to be seen as human, and increased that character's chance of survival or success in Britain. Marjorie Darke's pioneering trilogy about a formerly-enslaved Black Briton and his descendants included two focused on sport. **The First of Midnight** (1977) concerns a formerly enslaved man forced into the boxing ring to recoup a white woman's lost fortune before he finally escapes Britain altogether. The third book in the trilogy, **Comeback** (1986) is a contemporary story about a girl who uses gymnastics to both construct and understand her identity in British society. These seem to be the options presented to Black Britons during the 1970s and 1980s: go "back home" or learn to fit in. More recently, Catherine Johnson's **Hero** (2001) has another Black boxer in the early 19th century who is sent back into slavery in the Caribbean while his daughter learns to become a prizefighter herself in order to rescue him.

Boxing continues to be prominent in sports books about characters of colour. Nikesh Shukla's **The Boxer** was nominated for a 2020



Carnegie Medal, along with another boxing book – **Gloves Off** by Louisa Reid. In some ways, these books are similar; both main characters learn to box because they are threatened by others. But Reid's Lily, who is white, takes up boxing to defend herself against bullies that she knows, while Shukla's Sunny, who is British Asian, learns to box in response to an unprovoked attack by unknown assailants. Lily has her home life where she feels comfortable and safe, but for Sunny, there is no place that is safe from racism. This is not to make Reid's story any less important; bullying is real, and painful for those who experience it. But it is a different experience to never feel safe because racism is pervasive within a society and can appear at any moment. The attack that Sunny suffers is by just a few older boys, but he later learns they are part of a far-right movement whose members are angry – still angry, in 2019 – about "immigration".

A similar theme can be found in another Carnegie-nominated title, Catherine Bruton's **No Ballet Shoes in Syria**. Bruton's story concerns a more recent set of immigrants, a refugee family from Syria. Although they, like Sunny, encounter racist attitudes and comments, the biggest problem for them is the dehumanization of refugees and immigrants by society as a whole. Being seen as less than human by racist landlords is amplified by an asylum process where paperwork is more important than people. For Aya, dance – physical movement – allows her to take up space legitimately in Britain, and be seen for the human that she is. In her struggle, she is helped by a ballet teacher who was also, when young, a refugee; and by a Black British girl named Dotty, who does not quite fit in to her ballet class (being too "messy" and lively). People who are "othered", Bruton (who is white) seems to be saying, will help other outsiders more readily than those who aren't.

Musa Okwonga's **Raheem Sterling** (2020) is part of Scholastic's **Football Legends** series. Sterling's journey to the very top of professional football provides ample material for a story that would interest a football fan – but Okwonga's text deserves an even broader readership. This is principally for two reasons. First, he employs his skills as a sports journalist to bring into focus a moving, personal story. By narrating imagined conversations between actual people, in the style of a docudrama, Sterling's life is made vivid for readers. The dates and statistics that often bog down football writing are presented in the epilogue in narrative form, allowing Okwonga to focus instead on the drama and emotion of Sterling's journey from a child in Jamaica to a schoolboy kicking a ball a short distance from Wembley Stadium to a man scoring a hat-trick for England inside the stadium. He writes of the love between Raheem, his mother and sister and the sacrifices each make in order to build a better life for themselves and each other. Sterling's resilience and determination to succeed are emphasized, but so too is his vulnerability.

Second, Okwonga writes sensitively of how Sterling has more than once found himself the subject of media conversations. The biography details Sterling's decision to use Instagram to highlight the way a white team-mate was praised for buying a home for his parents whilst a black team-mate was criticized for being unduly extravagant when doing exactly the same thing: "In just a few weeks, the newspapers that were the biggest bullies changed how they wrote about Raheem, and about some other black footballers. They realized that Raheem was too popular for them to pick on, and that if they kept picking on black players then their readers wouldn't like them so much." (p78-9)

Whilst Sterling's life-story shows us that racism has not gone away, his response to it perhaps marks a shift. Not only has he achieved on-pitch success in England like Black players from Walter Tull onwards, he has also spoken up about racism – and been applauded by many for doing so. In so doing, he has rejected the 'go back or fit in' binary that has been presented to so many sportspeople of colour, and instead achieved success as a team-player on his own terms.

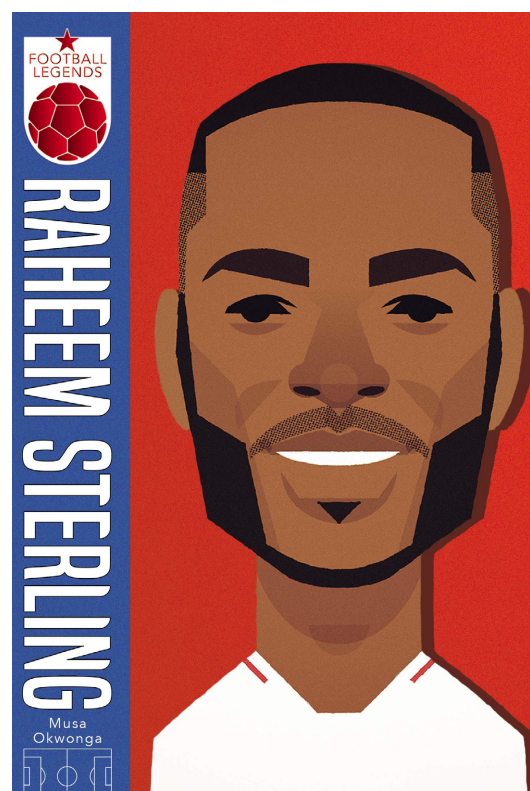
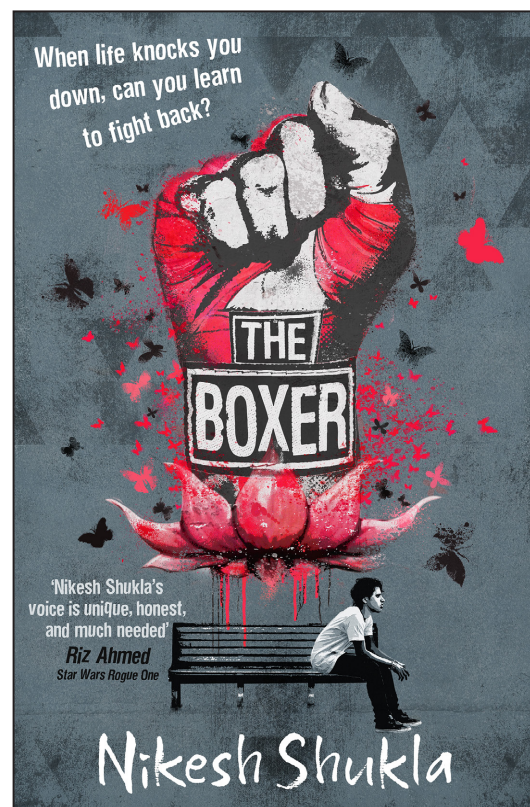
Walter Tull's Scrapbook, Michaela Morgan, Lincoln Children's Books, 978-1847804914, £7.99 pbk

The Boxer, Niklesh Shukla, Hodder Children's Books, 978-1444940695, £7.99 pbk

Gloves Off, Louisa Reid, Guppy Books, 978-1913101008, £10.99 hbk

No Ballet Shoes in Syria, Catherine Bruton, Nosy Crow, 978-1788004503, £6.99 pbk

Raheem Sterling, Musa Okwonga illus Stanley Chow, Scholastic, 978-1407198422, £5.99 pbk



Karen Sands-O'Connor is the British Academy Global Professor for Children's Literature at Newcastle University. Her books include **Children's Publishing and Black Britain 1965-2015** (Palgrave Macmillan 2017).



Darren Chetty is a teacher, doctoral researcher and writer with research interests in education, philosophy, racism, children's literature and hip hop culture. He is a contributor to **The Good Immigrant**, edited by Nikesh Shukla and the author, with Jeffrey Boakye, of **What Is Masculinity? Why Does It Matter? And Other Big Questions**. He tweets at @rapclassroom.

I wish I'd written...



Roopa Farooki's new book, **The Cure for A Crime**, (978-0192773593) the first book in the **Double Detectives Medical Mysteries** series, is published by Oxford University Press, £6.99 pbk.

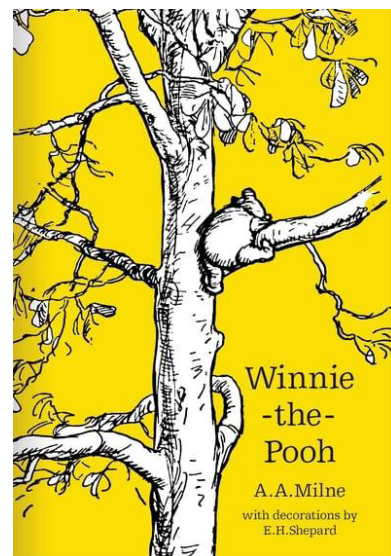
Roopa Farooki chooses the book that reminds her what it is to be a child

The children's book I wish I'd written? It has to be **Winnie-the-Pooh** by A. A. Milne.

I first read the original A. A. Milne books and the poetry collections when I was about six years old, and was inspired to create imaginary adventures with my own oversized teddy. I rediscovered the books by reading them to my two boys and twin girls when they were babies.

The stories of Pooh and his friends are true to the tips of his honey-dipped paws. So wise, witty and whimsical, from pretending to be a cloud with a blue balloon, to improvising a boat from an upturned umbrella. I love how the world grows from Christopher Robin's nursery to the Hundred Acre Wood, how Pooh, Piglet, Eeyore and Owl have their own friendships and flaws and fights. It is exactly how I wrapped stories around the toys in my bedroom. It is what my four children do now.

Winnie-the-Pooh reminds me what it is to be a child, to be always curious, sometimes cross and full of wonder about the everyday. It reminds me that we are never alone as long as we have our extraordinary imaginations. It reminds me of the forever nature of friendship. My favourite Pooh line is from one of Milne's poems, when Pooh and Piglet are hunting dragons. "I wasn't afraid", said Pooh, said he/ "I'm never afraid with you."



Winnie-the-Pooh by A. A. Milne, illus E. H. Shephard, is published by Egmont, 978-1405280839, £14.99 hbk

Good Reads

This issues Good Reads are chosen by pupils at **Kingston Grammar School**.

Helen Cleaves was one of three librarians on the Honour List for the **School Librarian of the Year 2019**, recognised for the impact she had as Learning

Resources Manager while at Kingston Grammar School. She ensured that the library was always welcoming, relevant and purposeful and ran innovative reading promotions including establishing the school's first Poet Laureate and regularly producing **The Guilty Librarian** podcast.



Amelie

The Bridge to Terabithia

Katherine Paterson, Puffin, 978-0141359786, £6.99 pbk

Bridge to Terabithia is a young adult novel that deals maturely with a friendship streaked with loss and tragedy. In this adventure-fantasy book, when Jesse Aarons forms an unexpected friendship with the new girl and neighbour, Leslie Burke, they create a magical kingdom named Terabithia. A world of giants and spirits, it's a world away from Jesse's difficult home-life of 1970's America.

Despite their contrast in character, their personalities complement each other. Whereas Leslie is imaginative and courageous, Jesse is shy and artistic. However, Leslie teaches Jesse how to be more carefree. The more time Jesse spends in Terabithia, the more he sees that, 'in the shadowy light of the stronghold everything is possible'.

In spite of this book being banned in many American States because of its questioning of religion and the tragic twist, I believe that it deserves its place as a modern classic because of its beautifully written theme of friendship. I would recommend this book to anyone with enough imagination to swing across to Terabithia.

Amelie Amalou, Second Year



Jack

The Murderer's Ape

Jakob Wegelius, Pushkin Children's Books, 978-1782691754, £8.99 pbk

A gorilla, but not your normal gorilla: an engineering, chess champion gorilla. Sally Jones' captain on the Hudson Queen (boat) has been arrested for murder. But she knows he didn't do it. On a terrifying and extremely exciting journey Sally Jones ventures out into the world to prove her captain's innocence. Meeting great friends and enemies along the way, she makes sure she will get her captain out of prison even if it is the last thing she does. No one knows how old she is or where she came from, but this gorilla can do anything. Or can she? When times get tough and fleeing from the police and people who are out to get her, can she really trust anyone?

I would recommend this book to children aged 12 years and above and would rate the book 4 out of 5 stars due to the sheer brilliance of the author and the way it pulls you in and makes you feel all of Sally Jones' emotions.

Jack Brady, Second Year



Sophie

India Smythe Stands Up

Sarah Govett, Marotte Books, 978-1916152601, £7.99 pbk

India Smythe Stands Up is a captivating and eventful read, filled with humorous moments. It is about a girl called India facing all the typical struggles of teenage girls – annoying parents, strict teachers and boyfriends! India has been asked out by the hottest boy in the year, Ennis. However, deciding to go on a date with Ennis isn't as easy as it should be. Although India is tempted, she actually enjoys spending time with less cool orchestra-going Rich – so who should she go for?

I would 100% recommend this book to all teens; I have already read it twice and will read it again! It is a book teenagers can really relate to and conveys some really powerful messages about status, friendship and standing up for what is right. You won't be disappointed if you read this book.

Sophie Bailey, Second Year

Jan Mark Is Here!

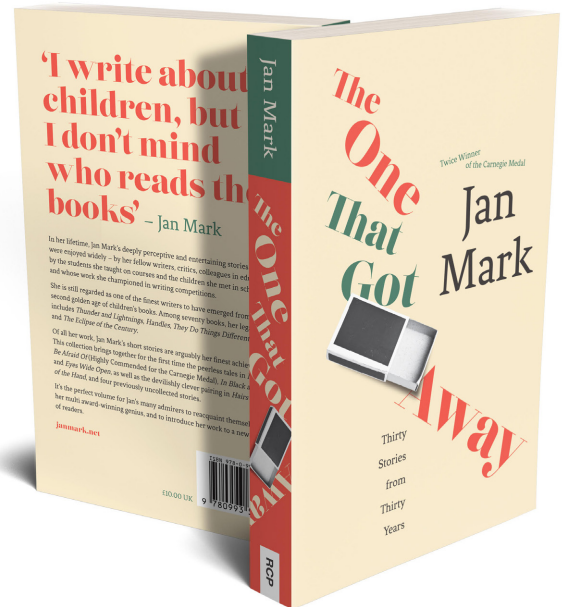
A new website and new story collection celebrates **Jan Mark**, one of children's literature's most distinguished authors. Founder Jon Appleton introduces **Jan Mark is Here.**

Jan Mark was one of the most acclaimed writers for children to have emerged in the mid-late 1970s, at the end of the second golden age of children's literature which saw a flourishing of talents including Philippa Pearce, Alan Garner and Joan Aiken. She began writing in response to a one-off competition launched by the Guardian and Penguin's new children's hardback imprint Kestrel to find new writers of contemporary children's fiction. Not only did she win, but **Thunder and Lightnings** was awarded the first of Jan's two Carnegie Medals. From then on, she was in demand – often publishing two or more titles in a year, from picture books to novels for readers of all ages. She was always first choice for anyone commissioning an anthology of short stories.

Jan's short stories are perhaps her finest work; certainly the work she found most satisfying. She once said, 'Writing short stories is harder than writing novels. You can't get away with anything in a short story; you shouldn't want to get away with anything in a novel, but it's almost inevitable that you do because in a novel you're aiming for an overall effect. It is said that in a novel every chapter must count; in a short story every sentence must count.'

Jan died suddenly in January 2006, with several books in various stages of production. Already, many of her titles had gone out of print after being backlist stalwarts. I knew a traditionally published retrospective collection would probably sink without trace in the wider retail landscape. But luckily, I've come to know exactly where her readers are, and so can speak to them direct.

In the past year, I've noticed people talking about Jan on social media. Often, they're teachers who read her as a child, or taught her books in the classroom, or engaged with her in professional development. Jan spent a lot of time in schools, encouraging children and teachers to gain confidence in their own writing through enjoying books of the highest quality and honing their skills of observation, their ear for and understanding of language. They treasure their copies of Jan's books and buy up second-hand copies wherever they find them.



I was inspired to build a website – please visit janmark.net – to bring these fans together. Trawling the internet I found a host of tributes and reminiscences to link to or republish, and many other people have generously provided their own memories of Jan. She also wrote generously about her own craft and inspiration for specific books so you'll find her words, too. Now I'm publishing **The One That Got Away: Thirty Stories from Thirty Years.**

Jan's fans are adults so it seemed obvious that the collection wouldn't be a children's book. She said, 'I write about children, but I don't mind who reads the books,' which permitted me to publish exactly the book I wanted – a big, fat volume, bringing together all the stories in three of her collections – **Nothing to be Afraid Of**, **In Black and White** and **Eyes Wide Open**, plus the two long stories in **Hairs in the Palm of the Hand**, and four previously uncollected stories.

There's an abiding truth about her work: she did write about children, accurately through the lens of a child equipped with whatever level of experience and understanding that comes with being five or eight or twelve, but she made her child characters face up to adults. Often her novels are about a journey over time away from childhood towards adulthood; the stories in **The One That Got Away** are about the specific moments where the blinkers come off and you can't unsee – you can't look back, only forwards. You're excused nothing. Sometimes, she even takes the teachers' and parents' side.

This is a book for grown-up fans but also one for them to introduce Jan Mark's work to today's young readers. Obviously, references have dated and language too, although the feminist vibe speaks more loudly than ever. The spirit of enquiry and enterprise, and a selective anti-establishmentarianism (in 'Mystery Tour' Ozzie writes, 'I don't like bossy grown-ups, but I can't stand bossy grown-ups who know less than I do'), are as relevant as ever. Several of the stories border on farce and make perfect read-alouds, particularly the title story, 'The One That Got Away' and 'Send Three and Fourpence We Are Going to a Dance'.

I hope these wide-ranging stories will once again inspire readers to appreciate the craft of writing – because Jan was a champion of anyone who cared about equipping children with the skills to write and read well – as well as offering readers sublime entertainment from a true master. If you haven't discovered her, you're in for a treat. Don't let Jan Mark be the one that got away!

To order **The One That Got Away** for £10 plus postage, visit www.janmark.net or email janmarkorders@gmail.com

Jon Appleton will be speaking about **The One That Got Away** and Jan Mark's work during the 'Boxes of Delights' evening, part of the **Think Human Festival**, on 11 February 2020 at Oxford Brookes University. To book free tickets, visit eventbrite.co.uk.

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Annie Brierley has worked in libraries and the related sector all her working life and is currently Library Supervisor in North Devon.

Rebecca Butler writes and lectures on children's literature.

Jane Churchill is a children's book consultant.

Stuart Dyer is an Head Teacher of a primary school in East Devon.

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

Janet Fisher is a children's literature consultant.

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

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

www.storyshack.org

Daniel Hahn is a writer, editor and translator.

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

Carey Fluker Hunt is a writer and children's book consultant.

Matthew Martin is a primary school teacher.

Sue McGonigle is a Lecturer in Primary Education and Co-Creator of

www.lovemybooks.co.uk

Margaret Pemberton is a school library consultant and blogs at

margaretpemberton.edublogs.org.

Neil Philip is an author, poet, mythographer and folklorist.

Val Randall is Head of English and Literacy Co-ordinator at a Pupil Referral Unit.

Andrea Reece is Managing Editor of **Books for Keeps**.

Sue Roe is a children's librarian.

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

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

Under 5s Pre – School/Nursery/Infant

The Boy Who Loved Everyone

★★★★

Jane Porter, ill. Maisie Paradise Shearring, Walker Books, 32pp, 978 1 4063 8064 4, £12.99 hbk

Dimitri is new at nursery and this friendly happy little boy wants to share the love he feels. Starting with his classmates during storytime, 'I love you' is what he tells them all. He continues so doing at playtime, telling not only the children but also the ants and trees in the playground. This utterance is repeated throughout the afternoon to pretty much everything and everyone he encounters by which time the children at least, feel Dimitri's loving rather too much of a good thing. The trouble is, nobody, not even the old man he and his mum pass on the way home, say it back: the only 'I love you' comes from his mum at bedtime.

Next morning Dimitri doesn't want to go to school, telling Mum how he feels. She in turn explains that people are different and consequently have different ways of showing their feelings. As they walk along she shows examples of this in practice: saying 'I love you' need not be spoken: actions can be equally effective.

When they arrive in the playground, Dimitri still feels a bit unsure of his welcome but it's not long before both the actions and words of his classmates let him know he's okay. Gradually he begins to feel a warmth spreading right through him and come storytime it's clear to everyone that Dimitri is accepted.

I love that circularity with the narrative starting and ending with storytime. Both Jane Porter's telling, which was inspired by a little boy from her nursery art sessions, and Maisie Paradise Shearring's richly detailed illustrations exude warmth and tenderness, and perfectly capture Dimitri's vulnerability, showing how the power of kindness eventually wins. Perfect for sharing with little ones at home or in early years settings. **JB**

Goodbye House, Hello House

★★★★★

Margaret Wild, ill. Ann James, Allen & Unwin, 34pp, 978 1 74331 110 3, £12.99 hbk

The little girl, whom we discover is called Emma, is moving from her old home to her new one, and in wonderful pictures full of thick black lines superimposed over flowing landscapes we see her saying goodbye to all the things she has loved and enjoyed in her old house: trees and animals out of doors and all the separate rooms inside. Last of all, we see her changing the wording on the wall in her room to 'Emma lived here'. When she gets to the new house, there is so much to see and

do both outside and in, and she is soon exploring it all, saying 'hello' to each new place. This is a wonderful introduction to moving house, and while Emma seems cheerful about it all, there is an underlying nostalgia about the old house. 'This is the last time I will eat at this table' for instance. There are lots of 'lasts' before the 'firsts' come along, and we sense that Emma has some ambivalence about the move. She is always shown in flat white with thick black lines outlining her body and showing her expressions. The few background landscapes in what appears to be watercolour have a feel of Australia about them, and are beautifully done, but the emphasis is on Emma and her experiences. At the end we see her writing on the wall of her new bedroom 'Emma lives here now' and we know the transition has been made. A lovely story. **ES**

Be More Bernard

★★★★★

Simon Philip, ill. Kate Hindley, Simon and Schuster, 978 1 4711 6462 0, £6.99, pbkk

A striking black and sparkly cover shows a with-it rabbit beneath a disco glitter ball, dressed in mod gear and sporting a red super-powers cape... dancing to music from its headphones, AND wearing roller boots. This is Bernard, who doesn't like the other rabbits in his warren, doesn't like carrots, doesn't like lettuce. He does try to conform, hopping when the other rabbits hop, bouncing when they all bounce. But he senses he is uncomfortable, and only feels himself in his far-from rabbit dreams. Finally, he discovers his true love – at Bertie and Brenda's Annual Bunny Ball. Here, he dresses just as we see him on the cover, most unbunny-like. Oh, how the others express their horror, at his audacity in dress as well as his actions! For he struts and swaggers and peacocks and hustles, grooves with grace, and jives with joy. It is wonderful, and Bernard has never before felt so

happy, so himself. Whilst the other rabbits are horrified by his outrageous behaviour, maybe one little rabbit isn't? Soon, Betsy is just as groovy, happy and different. That got the others thinking, and before long, they are all as different from each other as is Bernard. Finally, they all agree that although they are the same in many ways, 'being yourself is the BEST thing a bunny can be.'

Natty illustrations of all the rabbits give lots of talking points for readers, each spread being different in character from others, using the spaces to draw the eye to the actions, and following the text admirably. The rabbit force is a building company par excellence, and the pictures give us a peep into their very busy world before Bernard decides to be himself! **GB**

What I Like Most

★★★★★

Mary Murphy, ill. Zhu Cheng-Liang, Walker, 26pp, 978 1 4063 6904 5, £12.99 hbk

The little girl has lots of favourite things: the window she can look through to see what is happening on the street, apricot jam, trainers with flashing lights, the river, coloured pencils, chips, a favourite book, and a teddy. But she also understands that all of these things can change. She will grow and change, and the things she 'likes most' now will also change. But there is one thing in her life that will never change, and that is her mother. Mum was there before she was born, and she will always be her favourite thing, even when they are cross with each other. 'You are what I like the very, very most in the world.' The end pages in this book are particularly beautiful, one of spring and the other of autumn, and all the way through we see things that are favourites of ours too, things we might believe will always be there, but we know deep down will change, as will we. An evocative picture book that will help children understand the meaning of change in their lives and that it should be thought of as a positive. **ES**

5 – 8 Infant/Junior

The House of Madame M

★★★★★

Written and ill. Clotilde Perrin, Gecko Press, 10pp, 978-1-776572-74-8, £16.99, hbk

Are you lost? Then step this way! Madame M has some surprises waiting for you inside her rather unusual house. But do take care...

Clotilde Perrin's latest picturebook is a wonderfully gruesome lift-the-flap delight for readers who enjoy a ghoulish joke. Strikingly illustrated with

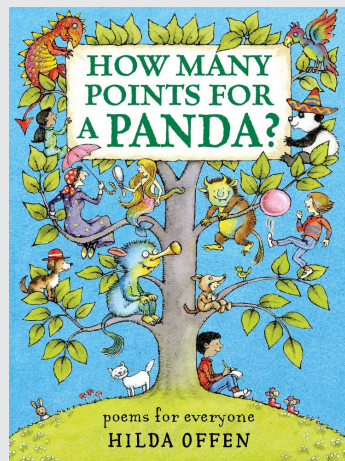
intricately detailed and darkly humorous spreads, this large-scale hardback features five room-sets containing more than 25 interactive constructions with macabre themes. From the seasonal clock in the sitting room (youth to old age in a single rotation) via the graffiti in the toilet (don't lift the seat!) to the monster-extractor above the hob (where even the supper is aware of death), many of its features will please older audiences, including reluctant readers and those who find it hard to concentrate on longer texts.

5 – 8 Infant/Junior continued

Visitors to Madame M's house are met at the door by a plague-beaked monster – 'one piece of advice: don't touch a thing' – and taken on a tour of a building with more than its fair share of gloomy corners. Accompanied by a laconic and very funny commentary, we're hustled from hall to sitting room ('devilishly charming') and on into the kitchen and beyond. With skeletons in every closet, there's plenty for us to see and do – as long as we don't mind sticking our fingers into some pretty nasty locations, that is. Do watch out for those knives in the sink, though... and it might be best to give the bathtub a wide berth. Simmering yourself over a low heat could make you sleepy, and that might not be a good idea...

Despite the brevity of the text there's a sense of energy throughout, drawing us towards the final page and our ultimate encounter. But it's the illustrations which really make this book, and which will be explored repeatedly.

If books were recipes, you might detect a **Fungus the Bogeyman** flavour about this one, together with a dash of Jan Pienkowski- and maybe a pinch of Fritz Wegner, too. But in **The House of Madame M** Clotilde Perrin's imagination, skill and joie de vivre have created an original and distinctly different dish, and it's a triumph. Enjoy! **CF-H**



How Many Points for a Panda?

★★★★★

Hilda Offen, Troika, 64pp, 978 11 912745 11 1, £7.99 pbk

With the author's own lively illustrations, these poems are perfectly pitched for younger readers. There are poems about family relationships; about flights of imagination; about everyday enjoyments and mysteries; and about finding your own place in the world. Hilda Offen has a gentle voice whose chosen subjects are closely observed and deeply considered and expressed in verse that is enviably simple and elegant. Perhaps she is best at capturing fleeting moments, like the memory of holding a duckling

in a farmyard, the insignificant but intense contemplation of an altered world through window glass, or the feel of a warm midsummer day in the park. She rarely strives for effect and the boy in one poem who enlivens his description of 'A Field' with warring knights and a unicorn is subtly and sympathetically chided for missing all the life that is actually going on around him there. On the other hand, in 'The Tour', a poem that echoes the celebrated "Naming of Parts" by Henry Reed, she is firmly on the side of a boy being dragged around a stately home who would much rather be out there running about in the sun. **CB**



Hansel & Gretel

★★★★★

Bethan Woollvin, Two Hoots, 32pp, 978 1 5098 4270 4, £6.99 pbk

Deliciously dark and wonderfully witty is Bethan Woollvin's topsy turvy reworking of the much-loved Grimm's fairy tale told from the witch's viewpoint. Said witch, Willow by name, is a good witch who lives in a self-built gingerbread home. It's little surprise then that when she comes upon two children scattering breadcrumbs behind them she has concerns about small creatures being led to her tasty residence, and asks them to assist her in cleaning them up.

Instead Hansel and Gretel ignore her request and continue on their way. When they reach Willow's home they start devouring the gingerbread. Willow however, being the good witch that she is, thinks they must be starving and invites them in for dinner.

Rather than being grateful for her hospitality, those greedy guests gobble up every single scrap of food. Still, their host manages to keep her temper in check.

From then on things go from bad to worse until Willow finally snaps. It turns out that she's not ALWAYS a good witch.

The terrific twist Bethan serves up at the end will leave audiences and readers aloud spluttering with surprise and delight. From cover to cover, her signature style graphics for which she uses a limited orange, black and grey palette, are as always superb: powerful imagery bursting with wonderful details and as for that final spread – the eyes have it

– well and truly! Share this superbly subversive story and you'll be asked for immediate second servings for sure. **JB**

Winter Sleep: A Hibernation Story

★★★★★

Sean Taylor and Alex Morss, ill. Cinyee Chiu, words & pictures, 32pp, 978-0-7112-4283-8, £12.99, hbk

In this beautifully illustrated picturebook, the loving bond between a young boy and his grandma illuminates a natural history of exploration near her forest home.

'When it was summer, I stayed at Granny Sylvie's house. She knows lots of things. Like the names of flowers and how to spot a deer's hoof print...'

Sylvie and her grandson have a special summer place – a secret glade where they watch a dormouse scampering up a hazel tree. But as the long, warm evenings give way to the bare white snow of winter and Sylvie's grandson visits again, the dormouse is nowhere to be seen. Sylvie explains that she's hibernating. The boy wants to know whether other animals are hiding, too, so Sylvie tells him about bats in hollow trees, earwigs beneath the ground and other living things that sleep all winter long.

As Granny Sylvie and the boy make their way through Cinyee Chiu's evocative frozen landscapes, a series of cutaways and unusual perspectives allow us to see things that Sylvie and the boy cannot (a buried bee, the view from a bat roost, fish swimming beneath the ice...)

Readers will enjoy eavesdropping on their conversation and there is much to learn, but this book's value goes beyond its ability to inform. Sylvie is portrayed convincingly as a confident and active older woman, and the warmth and closeness of their cross-generational bond is clear.

Written by a duo well-used to communicating with children, **Winter Sleep** has an appealing text and is well-pitched for its intended audience. The shift to a more conventional non-fiction format occurs quite naturally once the boy has gone to sleep, and its inclusion will equip readers with skills they can apply elsewhere.

Winter Sleep is a rewarding book that will interest children who don't usually choose non-fiction – as well as those who do – and deserves to be widely shared. **CF-H**

How the Stars Came to Be

★★★★★

Poonam Mistry, Tate Publishing, 32pp, 978 1 8497 6663 0, £12.99

With her stunningly beautiful visuals, inspired by nature and Indian traditional designs, Poonam Mistry offers a folk tale style answer to the age-old question of how the stars came to be in the sky.

There was a time when light came only from the sun and the moon. This was fine for most of the days each month but left a few that gave the fisherman's daughter cause to

fear for her father's safety out at sea at night with no moon to guide him. Such is her concern that one morning the Sun finds her shedding tears and asks her why she is so distressed.

Her response fuels the Sun with an idea. Taking a golden ray, he throws it down to earth where it shatters into a million glowing fragments. These he instructs her to gather up and place into the sky once he's dropped beneath the horizon. "We will call them stars," he says.

That night the Girl begins her task, placing the brightest star above her head and naming it Polaris. Piece by piece she carefully positions the stars, fashioning them into wonderful images; but no matter how many she uses, her bag still appears to be full. Has she taken on an impossible task?

All the while a monkey has been watching the Girl and as she sits despairing, he grabs her bag and dashes back up to hide in the trees. The Girl follows, a struggle ensues and out tumble all the remaining stars, seemingly ruining her work. But do they? Accidents do occasionally have happy outcomes ...

Intricately patterned, awesome art shines out at every page turn of this book. **JB**

The Red Suitcase

★★★★★

Gilles Baum, ill. Amandine Piu, words & pictures, 40pp, 978 0 71124 550 1, £11.99 hbk

In a world of dragons, some of whom are fierce and war-like, one small, green dragon takes his empty suitcase on an epic journey, over hills and valleys, through rain and danger and risks, over a sea to a strange place where he can feel safe. When he finally arrives, he is faced with a lot of other young dragons who aren't really interested in his story, until one is friendly and shares his chocolates. The 'red suitcase' is a place of refuge during the journey and is used as a sledge, as a boat, and as a way to keep the rain off. There are great dangers – a large sleeping dragon, crowds of people who must not notice him, barbed wire, and, always, loneliness. This world of fear and horror makes an allegory of homelessness and the refugee crisis, and my only slight criticism of what is a beautifully produced book, is that the message is so subtle that it might be missed if used with very young children who won't quite understand all the fine-drawn subtleties. The illustrations are beautifully done with vast white spaces and the small dragon's adventures front and centre on each page. Little birds help him along the way, and he does find safety and friendship. A beautiful book with hope in the end. **ES**

Bad Nana: Older Not Wiser

★★★★★

Sophy Henn, ill. Sophy Henn, Harper Collins, 164pp, 9780008268060, £5.99, pbk

In this vibrant new illustrated series by

Sophy Henn, readers are introduced to Jeanie and her very large family, including a rather naughty nanny.

One of Jeanie's grandmas is called Bad Nana, as she isn't exactly the sweet-natured old dear sometimes stereotyped in children's stories. Instead she is mischievous and menacing and loves causing a little chaos.

In this first episode, Bad Nana takes on a grumpy park keeper and a short-tempered museum guide, both of whom are committed to spoiling people's fun, and Bad Nana refuses to allow such miserly behaviour. Her methods are far from evil, but she is certainly happy to break the rules, just a little, if something stands in her way. It is clear that Jeanie worries about her nana's behaviour and is sometimes a little embarrassed by it but, really, she is proud to have such a fierce, independent lady fighting her corner.

The story is simple and funny, but the most enjoyable element of the book is undoubtedly the bold neon artwork that explodes from every single page. Many jokes and little comic details are hidden in the illustrations, which readers will be happy to return to again and again.

This first book of the series really feels like an appetiser, as the close relationship between Jeanie and her nana is only explored to a small extent, and there is a very enjoyable feeling that Bad Nana is holding some mayhem back for future episodes. **SD**

The Princess Rules

★★★★★

Philippa Gregory, illus Chris Chatterton, HarperCollins Children's Books, 256pp, 978-0008375485, £12.99 hbk

Princess Florizella subverts all the established conventions of a fairytale princess. Such conventions are specified for her and all other royal princesses in the book of Princess Rules. The key rules are that princesses live largely off air, only occasionally consuming bread and green tea. Princesses must be rescued. They must never be the rescuer. They must of course marry a handsome prince.

Florizella violates all these rules. She attends a ball, along with several other princesses. Unlike all of them, when the dinner is served Florizella tucks in – to the horror of her fellow princesses. The handsome Prince Bennett dances with the other princesses. But when he asks Florizella to dance, she replies that he must be tired so why don't they sit and talk instead. The upshot of this unusual encounter is that Bennett asks Florizella to become his wife. She refuses. She has her own position and her own possessions and she does not wish to become someone else's subordinate. She would prefer to become Bennett's best friend.

There are two other stories contained in Gregory's book. Florizella befriends a pack of wolves. She and her friend Prince Bennett disguise one of the wolves as a domesticated dog so that it can live in her palace. In the last episode Bennett and Florizella have to make spectacles for a giant. There is no end to royal duties.

This book depends upon the young reader's familiarity with the standard conventions of a royal fairy tale – and then turns those values upside down when the Princess behaves in her own outrageous manner. The narrative emphasises the attributes that distinguish Florizella from her more conventional peer group, her independence and feminist freedom. Yet at the same time Bennett fully shares her adventures. He is no macho sidekick but a full partner in her quest for freedom. Chatterton's illustrations are full page monochrome creations, mostly subscribing to the conventions of the fairy tale book. **RB**

Greta and the Giants

★★★★★

Zoe Tucker, ill. Zoe Persico, Frances Lincoln, 978 0 7112 5375 9, 32pp, £6-99, pbk

The name Greta Thunberg is of worldwide renown recently, being a Nobel Peace Prize nominee in 2019. She has talked about global warming to politicians and rulers throughout the planet, with single-mindedness in defending the natural world from human destruction. In this picture book, a small child, Greta, lives in a beautiful forest. When the forest creatures she loves come to her, distressed at losing their habitat to the giants, Greta is spurred into action. For these giants, ever busy, are chopping down vast areas of forest, building towns which grow into cities, full of factories, shops, cars and planes...until there is hardly any forest left. As a lone voice Greta stands holding a sign entreating STOP. She is ignored by the giants. But soon other children join her, begging that the devastation of the forests stop. The message is NO ONE IS TOO SMALL TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. Optimism presides! Sadly, this is a book of our times, and the time for preventative action is now. The book's publishers are donating 3% of the cover price to Greenpeace UK for each copy of this book sold. The rich illustrations heighten the impact of this excellent book. Greta's name should go down in history with such greats as Sir David Attenborough and Dr Jane Goodall. And their messages of hope for preserving our planet, its plants, birds, and beasts as well as people, should shine like a beacon. All schools and libraries should hold multiple copies of this book; and if individual homes did too, what might that achieve? Greta is a child of our times. We should listen.... **GB**

Beast Feast

★★★★★

Emma Yarlett, Walker Books, 32pp, 978 1 4063 8663 9, £10.99 hbk

Beast by name but perhaps not entirely so by nature, for when he catches something tasty for dinner he decides to share the repast – a little boy whom he names Dinner – with his friends. He writes letters to them inviting them to a feast.

Dinner however has no desire to be consumed and resolves to try and get Beast to change his menu.

Beast's friends too want changes made to the meal for each includes instructions for cooking Dinner along with their acceptance of his invitation. One desires a salty meal so Dinner talks Beast into going for a swim in the ocean; another wants slimy food so Dinner's suggestion is a swamp visit. Over several days Dinner's playful notions have an effect on Beast: he's actually enjoying the company of the crafty Dinner but has the lad sufficiently beguiled the cook to save himself from the pot?

With vibrant illustrations full of delicious details, a page turner of a tale (with touches of Scheherazade) that includes five letters, recipes yummy and yucky and lots of tasty wordplay Emma Yarlett has herself cooked up a delectable picture book offering that will most certainly have listeners demanding 'more please' whenever you share it. **JB**

Snow Leopard, Grey Ghost of the Mountain

★★★★★

Justin Anderson, illus. Patrick Benson, Walker, 32pp, 978 1 4063 7828 3, £12-99

Justin Anderson wanted to share his fascinating insights into the rare and magnificent Snow Leopard, after having produced the Mountains episode of *Planet Earth 2*. This remarkable book relates Anderson's

journey up into the Himalaya to search for them. Called the Grey Ghost, the snow leopard is a rare and fast becoming endangered species, and his descriptions of the journey, the tracking and sighting of one female, and later, her cub, are magical. There is a huge sense of awe and wonder as Anderson and his guide track the cats further up the mountain. Alongside the telling of the adventure, there is more factual information in small italics for absorbing after reading the account. For instance, we are told that snow leopards live as high as 5,400 metres up in the mountains. Their tails are the longest of all the cat family, working both as a scarf when at rest in the snow, and as a balance when jumping between rocks. Their camouflage is such that they can merge totally into the surrounding landscape. Anderson tells of watching the leopard squirting pee over a rock, a message, a pee-mail for other leopards that she is around. As the sun sinks, the leopard climbs higher, terrain and lack of oxygen preventing any hope of them following. His final view is of her, silhouetted on a summit, singing; a long, haunting yowl, echoing round the mountains, before fading on the wind. And then she is gone, swallowed up by the silence. With brilliant drawings by Patrick Benson, a highly awarded illustrator for such classics as *Owl Babies* (Waddell) and the *Sea-Thing Child* (Hoban), this is a book to be treasured. Benson portrays this creature, her huge furry paws and all-seeing eyes, standing in her environment, merging with the mountainous background, in an animal majesty that could only be evoked by a talented artist. The book closes with a double spread of further information on snow leopards – maybe only 3,920 left in the wild – and links for further research. Finally, a quote from the author: 'The first time I saw a snow leopard I was so excited I danced a little jig of joy'. A celebratory book. **GB**

8 – 10 Junior/Middle

The House in Hawthorn Road

★★★★★

Megan Wynne, O'Brien Press, 304pp, 9781788490900, £7.99 pbk

Beth is angry and lonely; the family have had to leave London to live in Dublin after the death of their Gran. It is not as if it is even a nice house – and the back wall has to be knocked down to make the kitchen bigger. She has no friends and a new school to contend with. It is the last straw when a strange boy invades the home causing mayhem – and disappears. Who is he? Where has he gone? The answers to these questions draw Beth into the strangest situation imaginable...

Megan Wynne is no stranger to writing but this is her debut novel for a young readership. She takes her readers on an intriguing time-slip adventure as Beth and Robbie move

between the decades that separate them; nor is it just the children, the adults find themselves involved. A bold move that is handled confidently ensuring the reader is drawn into the fiction. The characters are lively and believable and the time differences interesting. We move between the '50s and the 2000s; so close and yet so different – and a subtle lesson in recent history. The narrative is further strengthened by the author's use of multiple viewpoints which include the adults as well as the children. The whole is told in a direct unpretentious contemporary style that avoids long descriptive passages relying on dialogue to create immediacy, character and background. The result is an enjoyable and engaging novel that may be recommended to confident KS2 readers. We must look forward to more from this author. **FH**

8 – 10 Junior/Middle continued



The Cure for a Crime

★★★★

Roopa Farooki, OUP, 282pp, 978 01927 73593, £6.99 pbk

Twins Tulip and Ali have noticed that their mother seems to have become particularly sleepy and distracted ever since her boyfriend Sturgeon moved in. They decide to run away to the hospital where their mother works as a doctor but are rumbled on the way there by their grandmother Nan-Nan while they are assisting a lady who has collapsed. Having acquired basic medical know-how from their mother the twins know exactly what to do but are surprised to find their grandmother Nan-Nan has discovered their whereabouts so quickly. She returns the girls to school much to their disgust. She often looks after the twins while their Mum is working but she has a mysterious past and the twins are eager to find out more even though Nan-Nan is evasive.

Back at school several of the teachers begin to fall asleep too and the twins become suspicious that this seems to happen when Sturgeon has been at the school, supposedly conducting a research experiment. Convinced he must have something to do with the mystery malaise, the twins together with sidekicks Zac and Jay, and Nan-Nan who turns out not to be quite as she seems, set out to solve the mystery.

The witty repartee between the twins is particularly well-done and Nan-Nan is comic genius. The plot zips along, perhaps a little too mad-cap in places but it all makes for an accessible and enjoyable read. And the story is just as much about intergenerational and family relationships as it is a mystery to solve. A feel-good and lively mystery which offers a slightly different take on the usual detective genre. There are plenty of medical facts sprinkled throughout the story too and a helpful glossary at the back of medical tips. **JC**

Football Superstars: Ronaldo Rules

★★★★

Simon Mugford, ill. Dan Green, Welbeck, 128pp, 9781783125333, £5.99, pbk

Simon Mugford and Dan Green's new non-fiction series is perfect for young football fans, and this edition focuses on the most popular footballer of all.

Ronaldo's fame is unparalleled and, despite playing abroad, he fascinates young football fans, having achieved legendary status through his incredible haul of achievements at club and country levels. This book equips children with everything they need to become the complete authority on CR7 and to win the popular playground debate: Messi versus Ronaldo.

There are plenty of aspects of Ronaldo's fame to be explored, be it his goals, or his charity work, or even his personal hotel, and this book leaves no stone unturned in its efforts to seek out all the top Ronaldo secrets. There are chapters that are very loosely based around a theme, and the book succeeds in arranging an immensity of Ronaldo trivia in a way that is engaging, eye catching and fun. Pages are bursting with Christiano cartoons and calligrams, alongside lots of imaginatively displayed stats and graphs.

The book is designed in such a way that budding statisticians could pour over every page, happily memorising facts and figures, but it can also be flicked through more leisurely. It is easy to imagine it being passed around playgrounds, with friends pointing out their favourite sections to one another. The choice of information is good, too, with just enough information about Ronaldo as a person to add some interesting context, without getting in the way of all the juicy football facts!

Football is often sought as a hook to get reluctant readers into books, and the accessibility of this series will make it very popular with children who find longer, fiction stories challenging. However, it is also essential reading for super fans and football trivia lovers, who will enjoy the challenge of collecting the entire set. **SD**

Forgotten Fairy Tales of Brave and Brilliant Girls

★★★★

Foreword by Kate Pankhurst, various, Usborne, 208pp, 978-1474966429, £12.99 pbk

Fairy tale princesses don't all sit around in towers waiting to be rescued by princes as this lively collection demonstrates. The female leads in these stories (four princesses and another handful of less elevated heroines) are all different but all driven by a desire to make their own decisions and lead their lives on their own terms. In a number of cases this



leads to them rescuing princes who have fallen under spells, but don't expect that their happy endings see them walking down the aisle. Indeed, my own favourite, Rose Red, walks out of a palace saying goodbye to friends and family and into a life of adventure: 'For all we know, she is exploring still'

Even in the 21st century, and with Frozen bringing feminism (or at least a form of it) to Disney, we still need stories like these to balance the weight of tales that define princesses by their beauty and passivity rather than their ability to wield a weapon or tool (the first princess in this book has her own tool belt). As the introduction points out, there are thousands of fairy tales, far more than the ones we know best and which were gathered by those who like the Brothers Grimm have shaped ideas of what fairy tales should be: 'As these tales became famous, they overshadowed all the others... The brave and brilliant girls were hidden from view.' Not so in this story collection, where the girl who, Rapunzel-like, is trapped in a tower manages to dig herself out.

The tellings are accessible – the story is all here – and fun too and should inspire readers to create their own adventures, both metaphorically and literally. There are illustrations throughout and the added bonus of an introduction by Kate Pankhurst reminding readers that it's within their power to be as brave and brilliant as the girls in this collection or the girls and women whose stories she tells in her non-fiction. **LS**

Trailblazers: Harriet Tubman - A Journey to Freedom

★★★★

Sandra A. Agard, ill. Manhar Chauhan, cover artwork Luisa Uribe and George Ermos, Stripes Publishing Ltd, 170pp, 978 178895 222 4, £6.99 pbk

In this short volume young readers are introduced to the remarkable life of Harriet Tubman, a fearless activist who was instrumental in securing the release of many slaves as a conductor on the underground railway; the secret network of safe houses on the road to freedom. Later she was enlisted as a

spy supporting abolitionists seeking to end slavery once and for all and she went on to become an inspirational speaker about her life and experiences of slaves and also on women's rights as well.

Harriet's amazing story is interspersed with information about life as a slave, rules and roles on plantations, the secret codes contained in songs, how to find your way and escape detection on the run and the broader historical context including the build up to the American Civil War.

This is an interesting book introducing a significant figure. It is one of a series of biographies from Stripes Publishing entitled **Trailblazers** celebrating the lives of pioneers, past and present, from all over the world. Other trailblazers are Neil Armstrong the astronaut and Jane Goodall the primatologist.

Written in an accessible style with a varied layout and black and white illustrations throughout, this text is engaging and easy to navigate. It includes a useful timeline, glossary of key vocabulary as well as an index. **SMC**

Rebel Girls

★★★★

Ada Lovelace Cracks the Code

Corinne Purtill, ill. Marina Muun, Rebel Girls, 128 pp, 978 1 733176187, £9.99, hbk

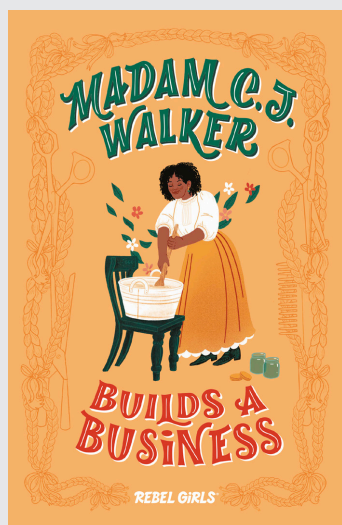
Madam. C.J.Walker Builds a Business

Corinne Purtill, ill. Marina Muun, Rebel Girls, 128 pp, 978 1 733176187, £9.99, hbk

Building on the success of the hugely popular **Goodnight stories for Rebel Girls** with its brief illustrated biographies of significant women, these two chapter books are the first of a new series from the **Rebel Girls** franchise with each focusing on a particular individual. With this format there is the opportunity to give a fuller account of their development and the experiences which shaped them to success and achievement in different fields.

Ada Lovelace Cracks the Code describes Ada Lovelace's life story and how, despite childhood illness and her early death she became a key figure in the development of computer programming. Readers learn about Ada's fascination with Science and Maths as a young child and the individuals who helped shape her development including her mother, inspirational tutors and mentors. Her collaboration with the inventor Charles Babbage triggered her interest in creating algorithms to instruct machines. However, her achievements were largely hidden in her lifetime due to the prevalent view that women did not have the mental capacity to comprehend mathematical ideas let alone create them.

Written in a lively style and illustrated throughout this book provides an accessible, attractive and highly readable insight into Ada's life. Her enthusiasm, personal difficulties and achievements are



clearly set in the context of nineteenth century attitudes to women and their capacities. The back of the book includes activities introducing the idea of coding produced by Wogrammer who collaborated with Rebel Girls.

Madam C.J.Walker Builds a Business is a fictional account of the life of Sarah Breedlove, aka Madam C.J.Walker, a remarkable woman whose life began in the cotton fields of Louisiana, the daughter of former slaves. It describes her journey to success and acclaim in the manufacturing business creating popular products for afro hair. Her determination and strength shines through as she works hard to gain an education for herself and her daughter, deals confidently with her main rival and prejudice within the male dominated business world. Through this achievement she transformed life for many black women. However, she was not content with this and became a philanthropist, generous in her efforts to help and provide opportunity for young black people in the community, even bequeathing her mansion in New York to this cause. In later life she also became an activist, using her fame and success to speak out against lynching of black men by white mobs which had in fact been the tragic fate of her beloved first husband.

An inspirational story of success against the odds, this is an interesting read with beautiful colour illustrations in each chapter, a very attractive design and end papers. The back of the book contains activities, created in collaboration with the crowdfunding platform iFundwomen.com, encouraging young readers to think like a would-be entrepreneur, designing and advertising products. **SMcG**

Demelza and the Spectre Detectors

★★★★

Holly Rivers, Chicken House, 321pp, 9781912626038 £6.99 pbk
11 year old Demelza, a red-haired orphan who lives with her Grandma Maeve, loves inventing gadgets, which sometimes means she gets into trouble, but she hadn't expected the trouble that would ensue when she discovers that her family are spectre detectors: people who can, temporarily, bring a loved one back from the dead for a last meeting. There is a lot to learn when she becomes an apprentice to Grandma Maeve, not least the very strict rules about what may be done and how to keep safe. An unhappy school life with bullying twins and a fierce Headteacher who seems to hate her means that her home life is important, as is her friendship with Percy, a boy who has to stay at home and live on pills because of 'his allergies and weak constitution'. Impulsive Demelza unintentionally reveals more than she should about what she is learning, danger looms and Grandma Maeve is captured. The price of her freedom could be Demelza's own life, but Percy and unexpected allies help her to rescue Grandma and unmask the person attempting to make her use her powers for an illegal purpose. Her inventions do prove useful, particularly the robotic hand: 'a miscellany of clock cogs, engine parts and kitchen utensils, all held together with blobs of solder and bits of sticky tape.'

Holly Rivers played the part of Drusilla Paddock, best friend of Mildred Hubble's rival Ethel Hallow, in the original ITV adaptation of **The Worst Witch**, shown about 20 years ago, and has since, among other jobs, been a children's storyteller. She also used to love inventing, and now runs drama and bushcraft workshops for children. This is her debut novel, but Barry Cunningham at Chicken House knows a good story when it lands on his desk, and this is an exciting page-turner which bodes well for Holly Rivers' future as a children's author. **DB**

The Big Book of Birds

★★★★★

Yuval Zommer (author & illustrator), Thames & Hudson, 64pp., 978-0-500-85151-3, £12.95 hbk

This large format book is an excellent introduction to birds and their lives, stunningly illustrated by the author. Starting with a double spread that turns sideways, we have the bird family tree, showing seven various types of birds, e.g. seabirds, birds of prey, flightless birds and so on. Turning the book back the normal way, we learn how to be a sensible bird spotter, then sideways again for a look at feathers and flying. This is really interesting: feathers are for recognizing each other, for warmth

and for showing off, as well as for flying, and the numbers are huge: 25,000 for a swan, 1,000 for a little hummingbird. The rest of the book is the conventional way up as we learn about migration, and then details of various familiar birds, with fascinating facts included e.g. a flamingo may perform a dance routine to impress a female with the help of up to 50 friends, and, if it gets too hot, it wees on its legs to cool down. A few poo details seem to help to keep children involved, but the facts are varied and definitely informative.

Each double-page spread has little blocks of text scattered about, mostly just one or two sentences, and lots of glorious illustration- it's difficult to single any out, but the puffin page is fun, and the cranes are particularly good, flying, nesting, and courting. After the spreads on individual birds, we look at different shapes of beak and what they are used for, bird calls and songs, and how we can help look after birds. There is also a particular egg to look out for on 15 pages, and, if this proves too difficult, small versions of the correct pages with the egg ringed are given at the end, together with a glossary, called Bird Words, and a good index. This is a lovely book to browse through, or to find particular information, and will be a useful addition to a school library, or for a budding ornithologist. **DB**

Mickey and the Animal Spies

★★★★

Ann Miller, ill. Becky Moor, Oxford University Press, 170pp, 9780192773630, £6.99, pbk

This is a detective story about a school girl, Mickey, whose passions for cracking codes and deciphering clues lead to membership of an elite network of spies - COBRA.

Mickey is a little young for this covert unit, and that's not the only reason she stands out from the other spies: she's the only human being. Mickey is a dedicated problem solver, though, and soon convinces the monkeys, rats, sloths and snakes that she has what it takes to join the squad...just in time to help them crack the case of the stolen diamonds and the missing dog.

It's a seemingly simple case of theft and the team set about finding the clues that will lead them to the diamonds and the dog. However, thanks to Mickey, they soon realise that the plot is much thicker than they'd anticipated, and doubts emerge over which members of the team they can truly trust.

This book works well as a conventional detective story - a whodunnit for animal lovers - with plenty of intrigue and a narrative that twists and turns all the way to the final chapter. Mickey's sense of adventure and love of codebreaking make her an interesting lead character, and her rapport with the animals in the story is humorously observed. The lethargic sloth and over-attentive spider monkey are particularly fun.

An early focus on the joys of codebreaking is not sustained, which is a shame as this adds an enjoyable extra dimension to the book. Moreover, the characterisation of Mickey and her friends is somewhat shallow, with little attention paid to the source of Mickey's quirky hobbies, for example. With lots of elements of Mickey's life left unexplored, and an infinite number of animal characters that could join COBRA's cast, Mickey and her team could certainly reform again soon to crack their next case. **SD**

Son of the Circus: A Victorian Story

★★★★

E.L. Norry, Scholastic, 196pp, 9781407191416, £6.99, pbk

This historical drama is part of the narrative non-fiction series, **VOICES**, which uses storytelling to teach children about periods from the past and the extraordinary lives lived by the famous and the not so famous. From this book, young readers can learn about the first black circus owner in Victorian Britain, Pablo Fanque.

The story is told by Ted, who lives with his mother and ill brother in Bradfield, until he is visited by the mysterious Pablo Fanque and learns that his absent father is a circus owner! Despite much anxiety, Ted is whisked off for a life at the circus, where he is introduced to a totally different world, and readers are taught about Victorian circuses, how they were run and the acts that were performed.

Ted doesn't find it easy to adapt to his new world, despite the somewhat reluctant tutelage of Larkin (a young boy who is determined to fight with Ted for Pablo's attention). The learning curve is steep and Ted finds it hard to believe that he will ever have what it takes to make it at the circus. Adding to his worries is the fact that the circus is clearly not succeeding in the way it once did, and Pablo is concerned for its future.

There is some excitement and jeopardy in Ted's journey with the circus, and his race to master the tightrope in time to save his father's company. However, more compelling than this main story arc, is the achievements of Pablo as a trailblazer and the challenges faced by Ted as a young man of mixed race in Victorian Britain, which is captured poignantly in a tense and dramatic scene involving a small group of violent racists.

The narrative on the whole is somewhat predictable, with few genuine surprises, and some readers may be disappointed that there aren't more opportunities to learn about genuine Victorian life beyond the circus. However, the story of Pablo Fanque is unique and engaging and this book is a welcome introduction to his story. **SD**

The Undeclared

★★★★★

Written by Kwame Alexander, ill. Kadir Nelson, Andersen Press, 40pp, 978-1-78344-928-6, £12.99, hbk

reviews

8 – 10 Junior/Middle continued

'We may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated' Maya Angelou

This deeply affecting picturebook for older readers is a tribute to the many experiences of African Americans, both past and present, and a powerful demand for change and growth.

Kwame Alexander's lyrical text quotes from the artists, athletes and activists whose naturalistic portraits gaze out at us from almost every page, and the book includes an informative index to help us identify them. But **The Undeclared** is more than simply a roll call of black heroes. As Alexander says in his afterword, much of what he's 'talking about in this poem, so much of American history, has been forgotten, left out of the textbooks, and to truly know who we are as a country we have to embrace all of our woes and wonders.' So **The Undeclared** doesn't just celebrate Thelonious Monk and Malcolm X, Serena Williams and Martin Luther King, it commemorates the unknown heroes of the everyday – those who are 'unspoken but no longer untitled', who remain undeclared despite the many wrongs inflicted on them. It's for 'the ones who survived America by any means necessary' as well as 'the ones who didn't' – because the unspeakable has happened, and is happening. Just look at the searing eloquence of that blank page; those broken photo frames.

This is not a book to shy away from challenges, and part of its value lies in provoking informed debate, but messages of resilience and hope resound throughout. Our children are looking to the future with energy and optimism, but they still need the passion and resilience of those who went before. They still need 'the swift, sweet ones who hurdled history and opened a world of possible...'

Kwame Alexander is a best-selling poet, author, playwright, producer and performer who won the **Newbery Medal for The Crossover** and is currently Innovator-in-Residence at The American School in London. Kadir Nelson is an award-winning illustrator who exhibits internationally and was the lead conceptual artist for Oscar-nominated film *Amsted*.

The Undeclared is an uncompromising tour-de-force that deserves a place in every library and classroom, where its ability to speak to the heart will provoke reflection, enable discussion and inspire creative responses as well as further research. **CF-H**

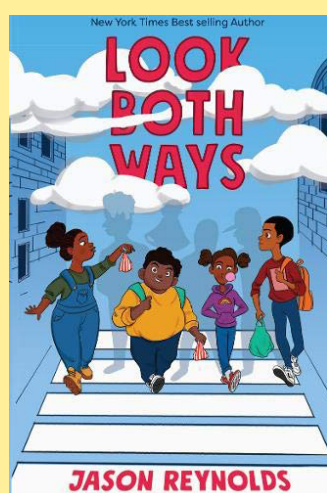
10 – 14 Middle/Secondary

Ed's choice

Look Both Ways

★★★★★

Jason Reynolds, *Knights Of*, 216pp, 9781999642594, £6.99 pbk
'A tale told in ten blocks' – in ten short stories we meet the pupils of the local High School who all live in these blocks down the road. Boys, girls, friends or not, as they walk they talk, dream, worry – or even imagine a school bus falling from the sky. Here young readers will see themselves reflected both facing very real situations or in their thoughts. We meet Jasmine and TJ as they walk and talk, their friendship a bulwark before a fractured home life; Fatima using lists to cope; Satchmo whose fear of dogs overwhelms him and others from their class and the Low Cuts, picking pockets...for what? This is the stuff of the everyday and here presented unadorned. The language is contemporary and colloquial, rich in the poetry and vocabulary of this school world. Though the setting is specific – an urban American High School – nevertheless the characters, their hopes, wishes, problems, anxieties and friendships are individual and universal. Young readers will



respond to the personal truths that lie behind the lives of the characters who come spilling out of this school bus that has fallen from the sky – a clear metaphor to bind it all together. Adults may feel for the teachers who make the occasional appearance – nether ogres nor saints, they too are people – doing their best. This is an unusual and refreshing book that should find its way into every school library – and classroom. **FH**

Stay A Little Longer

★★★★★

Bali Rai, *Barrington Stoke*, 115pp, 978-1-78112-832-9, £6.99 pbk
Barrington Stoke have long been producing excellent books for young people who find reading challenging. **Stay A Little Longer** punches way above its 115-page weight, delivering a story which never patronises, has an authentic teenage voice and tackles difficult issues head on.

Aman's father's death has hit her hard but she and her mother Jeet are close and trying to support each other through their grief, with the help of Aman's best friend Lola and Olivia, her grandmother. When Aman is bullied by two local Asian boys Gurnam, a neighbour, comes to her rescue. He quickly becomes part of the family-generous, warm, kind.

However, he has problems of his own which lead him to the brink of suicide. He is gay, but he is also a Sikh, a Sikh who has left his wife, daughters and grandchildren. Aman, terrified of losing the man she regards as a grandfather, manages to prevent him taking his own life.

The story is fast-paced and affecting, exploring a range of sensitive and contemporary issues. Rai creates characters exceptionally well-contrasting, for example, Aman's mother's compassion with the hard-heartedness of all but one of Gurnam's family. Community and family are at the heart of this thoroughly satisfying read. **VR**

Evernight

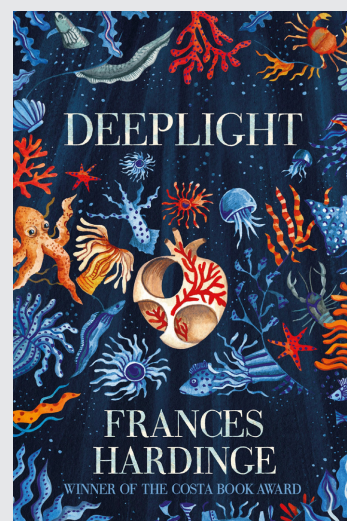
★★★★★

Ross MacKenzie, Andersen, 352pp, 978 17 834483 1 9, £7.99, pbk

Evernight introduces us to a world of magic and a struggle between good and bad witches. Our heroine, orphan Larabella Fox (known usually as Lara), makes her living searching the sewers for saleable rubbish. Above her, the city is ruled by a king who is the dupe of the leader of the White Witches, Mrs Hester. And Mrs Hester has sent Shadow Jack, her ruthless enforcer, not only to search for a mysterious box lost in the sewers but to release



the Evernight, a kind of devilish black hole, which envelopes the world in night and is accompanied by hordes of Painted Men who suck out the lives of their victims. Even at this stage in the retelling, before I add souls in cages and airships, you may sense the influence of other tales. But there's more than enough that's new, enough interest in the characters and enough excitement in the twists and turns of the plot to make what is possibly only Ross MacKenzie's first foray into this world a really gripping read. **CB**



Deeplight

★★★★★

Frances Hardinge, *Macmillan*, 437pp, 9781509836956, £12.99 hbk
Frances Hardinge has the weirdest, most fecund and generally extraordinary imagination of any contemporary children's writer. Far from ever running out of inspiration she gives the impression of having to constantly rein in her powers lest they take off in too many divergent directions. This current novel is set in an extended cluster of islands co-existing uneasily with the remnants of sunken gods now at the bottom of the surrounding sea. Once powerful, these over time had turned into monsters who then destroyed each other. But bits still survive, capable of transferring various powers to anyone able to haul them up from the deep.

The islands are now run by authoritarian governors ruling over a hierarchical society. Those at the bottom live in poverty and are sold as indentured labourers should they ever transgress. Mild-mannered 14-year-old Hank and his bullying friend Jelt are two such transgressors. After a robbery planned by Jelt goes wrong Hank is caught and faces three years in the galleys. He is saved by Dr Vyne, a grim researcher into the gods who puts Hank's plausibility to good use when it comes to interviewing elderly and infirm priests who still remember

the old days. But Jelt makes a return and Hank once again has to decide whether his own survival or what he thought was a friendship comes first.

Their troubled relationship is the key to what happens next, and Hardinge describes it vividly and with sensitive psychological understanding. Their island and its fantastic history meanwhile provide plenty of on-going excitement, given that nothing can ever be taken for granted. An exciting and near-fatal chase rounds up a memorable display of imaginative fireworks at their most spectacular. Is the mixture a little too rich on occasions? It is certainly a relief when Hank can spend a whole day without something unearthly coming his way. But with such a powerful imagination at work it is pointless to cavil over details. Read it and be swept away. **NT**

Tiger Heart

★★★★★

Penny Chrimmes, Orion, 245pp, 9781510107564, £7.99 pbk

This is a magical story set in a less than magical version of Victorian London. Fly is a young girl, abandoned at birth and then taken to work for a chimney sweep, climbing up and down the chimneys all day. One day she makes a bid for freedom and quite literally finds herself trapped in a cage with a rather large tiger. The strangest thing is that this creature begins to talk to her and she can understand him, but most oddly of all the tiger insists on calling her 'princess' and says that she comes from the same land as himself. They escape from the house they are in but find themselves hunted by the man responsible for bringing the tiger and other animals to this country. How they save themselves and many others as well as retrieving a valuable lost ruby makes for an exciting and mysterious story, with just a bit of magic, because after all tigers do not normally speak.

The author has created a fantastical tale much of which could have happened, but some of which is pure imagination. The descriptions of London and in particular the 'mud larks' who scavenge the shores of the river Thames really bring home the reality of Victorian London for those who were living in abject poverty. This is a story about friendship, knowing yourself and trying to understand the world around you. It is a lesson in not letting physical possessions become the most important thing in life, but in knowing that people are what make the world a better place to live in. It is a tremendous adventure story that does not flinch from showing the bad as well as the good; so people die and others are saved. There is cruelty and also great kindness and Fly learns who she is as a character as well as who her parents are. It is a great read and I am sure we will hear more from this author. **MP**

Asterix and the Chieftain's Daughter

★★★★★

Jean-Yves Ferri, illus. Didier Conrad, Orion, 48pp, 978 1 5101 0714 4, £7.99 pbk

You may not have noticed – I certainly hadn't – that, despite the inconvenient death of both his creators, indomitable Asterix lives on. The original writer of the stories, Rene Goscinny, died in 1977, and, for thirty years, while his name continued to appear on the new titles, it was the illustrator, Albert Uderzo, who was really their writer. Now, with the books in a third incarnation, Goscinny and Uderzo, trapped in marketing purgatory, continue to head up the cover of this new adventure in large capital letters, while the real author and illustrator, whose fourth Asterix book this is, hide in much smaller type beneath the title. Well, it's appropriate enough, if a little misleading, because things in the Gaulish village haven't changed much in more than half a century. The familiar characters are there, the magic potion continues to prepare them for their endless skirmishes with the local Roman garrisons, the jokes are as groan worthy, and, to my unpractised eyes, the illustrations are indistinguishable from the originals. Despite their reliance on national stereotypes and a cast that includes few female characters, Asterix titles have always given a nod to changing times and attitudes, so it's not surprising that this latest title puts a teenage girl centre stage. This is Adrenalin, the fictional daughter of the historical Vercingetorix, the leader of the Gauls defeated by Caesar. Asterix and Co. are given the job of keeping her safe from kidnappers in the pay of the Romans, while she is intent on doing her own thing. This is the cue for jokes around teenage behaviour and relationships with parents which draw in the fishmonger's son, Blinix, and the Blacksmith's son, Selfpix. Yes, the newly coined names, too, show contemporary influences. The Gaulish traitor hunting Adrenalin down on behalf of the Romans is Binjwatchflix. Here older readers may feel the loss of the more subtle wit of Derek Hockridge and Anthea Bell, the translators who originated the punning English names for the characters. But, for the most part, it's a book that will satisfy the fans. **CB**

Orphans of the Tide

★★★★★

Struan Murray, PenguinRandomhouse, 346pp, 9780241384435, £7.99 pbk

When Ellie pulls the boy from out of the whale's stomach, she sets in motion events that threaten to destroy The City. Once more the Enemy has found a Vessel who will enable it to take on a body. But Ellie, herself, has an enemy or is he her friend, her brother? Who

is this mystery boy, Seth? Ellie is convinced he is not the Enemy...but then who is?

This is a richly imagined fantasy full of action and jeopardy. The author does not dwell too much on the background; the City and its sea-based world is presented fully fledged and its antecedents and history are revealed through dialogue, asides and events as the story unfolds. We are immersed in a world where Inquisitors rule, always on the lookout for manifestations of The Enemy – a real entity who has caused destruction in the past but who requires a human 'Vessel' to come fully alive. Can it be defeated? The action takes place in a teeming urban setting, reminiscent of a Dickensian London. Ellie is an independent character determined to follow her mother's footsteps as an engineer and inventor. The sea is source of livelihood – and once there were the gods of the sea. Both Ellie and Seth have hidden pasts and memories that they are either suppressing or cannot access. It is their secrets that will provide the final twist to this plot-driven story. An immersive, intriguing, action-packed narrative from a debut author; recommended. **FH**

Sofa Surfer

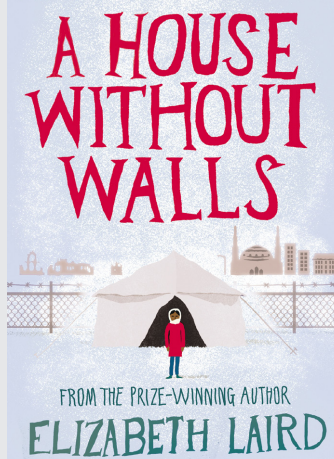
★★★

Malcolm Duffy, Zephyr, 320pp, 978 1 7866 9767 7, £10.99, hbk

Malcolm Duffy has set out to write a book that highlights the issue of teenage homelessness, and occasionally his novel reads more like campaigning literature than fiction, with at least one major episode contrived to demonstrate what it might feel like to spend a night on the streets if you're not prepared for it. However, this is an issue that needs raising and it's possible that young people might learn much from a story as well told as this. Tyler, the central character, is not homeless himself but has been uprooted from London to live in Ilkley in Yorkshire when his dad changes jobs. Friendless in his new home, he strikes up an acquaintanceship with Spider, a Geordie girl, who has just been thrown off the sofa at her cousin's house. At first, Tyler does not realise that Spider is sleeping rough but, once he does, he goes to some lengths to help her, including allowing her to live at his house, without his parents' knowledge, when he and the family are on holiday. If that sounds a bit far-fetched, it is nevertheless understandable in view of Duffy's drawing of Tyler's situation and character: lonely, temporarily alienated from his family, really well-meaning and more than a little hapless, particularly in thinking through the possible repercussions of his actions. Duffy embeds him in recognisable relationships, with his parents, with Michele, a possessive girl from school who has picked him for a holiday romance, and, most of all, with Spider, where his attempts to

help are appreciated and resented in equal measure. Duffy tells his story with winning humour and readers will be genuinely pleased, as I was, that both Tyler and Spider are in a better place at the end of the story. **CB**

COULD LOSING HER HOME MEAN FINDING HERSELF?



A House Without Walls

★★★★★

Elizabeth Laird, Macmillan, 9781509886012, 320pp, £6.99 pbk

Now out in paperback, this novel is told in the voice of Safiya, a twelve-year-old from contemporary Damascus in Syria. Without a mother, she lives with Baba, her comfortably off lawyer father plus older brother Tariq in an area of the town spared constant bombing. But serious threats come from the legions of secret police on the lookout for anyone out of sympathy with the regime. After a tip-off the family flees to neighbouring Jordan, and on the journey Baba is robbed of all his money. Their new home is now a tent pitched on a patch of ground outside the house of some better-off relatives. What started as something of an adventure has ended in disaster.

Deprived of any further schooling, Safiya now works cleaning the tent and cooking skimpy meals. But she remains an ever-lively presence with plenty of other diversionary interests and concerns going on in her young life. Why will no-one tell her anything about her dead mother? Will she ever find her lost twin sister? Is she being set up for an unwished-for early marriage? Chapters often end on these or other urgent questions still hanging in the air, hopefully to be answered in the next. This is story-telling at its most skilled and experienced.

Things do improve via a number of happy coincidences. Finally united with Saba, her twin sister, Safiya still has to work hard to make this new relationship viable. Her own angry and envious emotions that sometimes burst out render her all the more human and believable. In an afterword the author tells of working with present-day refugees and some of the memorable characters, young and old, she met while doing so. This excellent story does them all proud. **NT**

New talent

Where The World Turns Wild

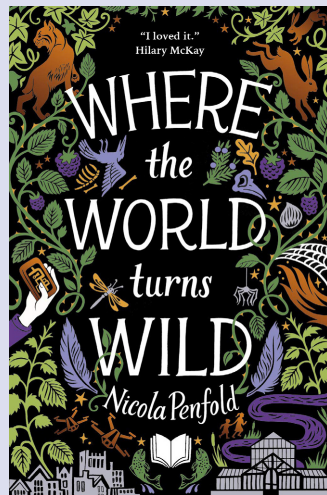
★★★★★

Nicola Penfold, Stripes, 223pp, 978-1-78895-152-4, £6.99 pbk

Where The World Turns Wild was selected for the 2018 Undiscovered Voices anthology and shortlisted for the Joan Aiken Future Classics prize in 2017. It is a prescient and convincing story of a world entirely cut off from the beauties of Nature it has done its best to annihilate. ReWilders, intent on preserving what remained, developed a virulent strain of ticks whose bites contained a disease which killed human beings. The result was the construction of cities which isolated human beings from all things natural and condemned them to wholly artificial lives under the oppressive control of leaders like Portia Steel.

Juniper and Bear, sent by their parents from Ennerdale to live in the city with their grandmother Annie Rose in the mistaken belief that they would be safer there, are resistant to the disease. When Steel orders those who are resistant to undergo blood transfusions in the hope of passing on the resistance to others, Annie Rose realises it is time for the siblings to attempt to escape the city and make the perilous journey to Ennerdale to rejoin their parents.

Penfold creates a chilling and viciously controlled environment in Steel's city where everything - including food - is artificially manufactured and all must abide by restrictive rules. It takes no great leap of imagination to see clear echoes of our own lives here, lives diminished by our increasingly aggressive overuse of the resources



of our planet. Bear and Juniper's journey is perilous and taxing but the protection of a lynx and of the band of Romany gypsies they meet when they are at their lowest ebb sustains them. It is, again, very telling that those elements of nature which they are able to identify they have previously only seen in books.

When they finally reach Ennerdale the poignancy of their mother's death four years ago and their father's temporary absence from the settlement beautifully avoid the saccharine trap of the happy ending. The children must decide where in the Wild their future will eventually lie, but wherever it is, they will be free.

Where The World Turns Wild is a beautifully crafted novel which skilfully weaves a multiplicity of narrative strands together. On one level it is an exciting and affecting read-on another it is an urgent summons to save what little we have left of the natural world. **VR**

Prisoners of Geography – Our World in 12 Simple Maps

★★★★★

Tim Marshall, ill. Grace Easton, Jessica Smith, Simon & Schuster, 78pp, 978 1 78396 4130, £16.99, hbk

Based on the acclaimed original book written for adults this version seeks to introduce geopolitics to a younger age group showing the combined impact of geography, history and politics on the world we know.

The book includes annotated maps with key events, decisions and policies which have been significant in causing countries to prosper or struggle. Readers discover how the USA has been 'blessed by geography' becoming a superpower and Africa has been 'hindered by Geography' and beset with problems due in part to its large swathes of desert regions. The impact of geographical features on trade, defence and prosperity is also illustrated. Two examples are

the mountain range which forms a natural barrier between India and China and the plentiful gas resources in Russia which have given the country strategic power.

There is a potted history of each region highlighting aspects of strategic importance such as why certain countries rule the waves and how they seek after and guard their sea routes. The impact of colonialism and key historical events have had on nations is explored including the development of the slave trade and the longstanding effect of arbitrary decisions made by western leaders which led to the partition of Pakistan and India and the creation of modern Iraq.

The book's creators aim to present complex ideas and concepts such as scale in a highly visual and varied format; for example, the true size of the continent of Africa is conveyed by demonstrating how many large countries such as China and The USA could fit within it. The annotated maps are interspersed with commentary,

additional information and striking illustration throughout, including several stunning full-page spreads.

An attractive, enlightening and interesting text not only for younger readers but adults too. **SMc**

Blue Watch

★★★★

John Harvey, Troika, 248pp., 9781909991996, £7.99 pbk

At fifteen years old, Jack knocks over his evacuee host, a rather brutal farmer, and finds himself back in London. In 1940 London is in the midst of the Blitz, and Jack's father who is a fireman on the Blue Watch of the title, is a very busy man. His mother has a new and very secret job and is living away, so Jack needs to find something to do. He is taken on as a Fire Brigade messenger, a risky job involving taking messages to various fire brigade units as the telephone system is often down. He encounters a refugee girl, Lilith who has made herself a home in a derelict house, and also becomes involved in helping the police solve a criminal gang being aided by a corrupt policeman.

There is a great deal of detail in the book of the work of the emergency services, principally of course the Fire Brigade during the Blitz, and a stark picture emerges of the life of ordinary people at this time. Jack is a resourceful lad, only seeming to exist on toast and jam with the odd pilchard, and at fifteen is doing a very adult job often in extreme danger, not only cycling through the aftermath of the bombing but also helping rescue people buried by debris. It would perhaps have been more credible for Jack to undertake such work if he had been sixteen, not fifteen? Would parents really leave a teenager to his own devices and such dangerous work?

There is a certain detachment to the writing which makes it at times a little hard to engage with Jack and his family, but the story does paint a good picture of the conditions under which people lived in the early years of the Second World War and is certainly not short of action. Because of some of the details this is towards the top of the age range 10-14. It would be good for teenage boys who are reluctant to read. **JF**

Orion Lost

★★★★★

Alastair Chisholm, Nosy Crow, 361pp, 978 1 78800 592 0, £6.99 pbk 25 pages in, and thirteen-year-old Beth has already faced up to a bully – a kid called Arnold several inches taller than herself – in what almost ended in a punch-up in the cafeteria. She's met a geeky girl whose non-stop chatter travels the familiar route from awesome to totally to dude and back again to awesome. There's a quiet lad who's into studying foreign languages. Beth finds an older boy, Vihaan, irritatingly cool, even contemptuous towards other young people. It could be one of those YA stories starting with the first day at a new school, where readers of Alastair Chisholm's debut novel might feel very

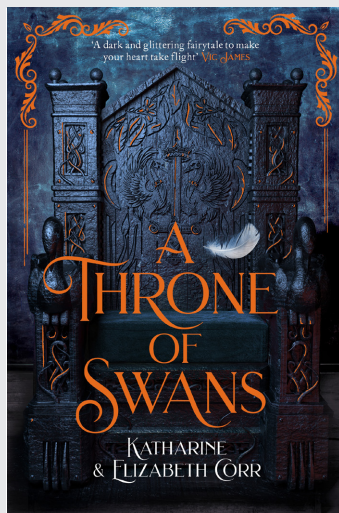
much at home; except they've also learned that they're aboard Orion, a transport spaceship embarked on a pioneering mission. As she explored the vessel, Beth has encountered the ubiquitous 'Ship, the Orion's central interface', a kind of Super-Alexa, which materialises as an oval blue head with "very lifelike eyes", floating into view when summoned by crew or passengers to provide advice, information, or answers to queries. In those early chapters, we have also met five of the novel's six young protagonists and glimpsed their main characteristics in action. Beth herself is interestingly complicated; she's uncertain about her own strengths, but in the way she handled Arnold we've already seen she lacks nothing in courage or empathy.

Orion's occupants are colonists, leaving Earth behind en route for a new life on the distant dwarf star, Eos Five. The young people's skills include high level computing, practical engineering and training in Command techniques. They'll need such resources in the coming days, for there are ruthless enemies out there in space, such as the piratical Scrapers who live by plundering ships like Orion. At least the Scrapers are human – the voyagers are far more wary of the Videshi, aliens whose intentions remain opaque. What's more, it seems there may also be an enemy within.

The world of Orion is convincingly 'other' without Chisholm overwhelming us with technology. One of his most ingenious inventions is 'Jumping', a manoeuvre whereby ships can slip swiftly through 'folds' in space, clipping light years off a journey. It's during an emergency Jump that major problems arise, leaving the young people in control of the ship, far from Earth while the adults lie locked in a state of suspended sleep, unable to be woken. Orion is seriously damaged; everything depends on the six young people, their skills, their native wits and daring – an echo of fictions reaching back to the likes of Coral Island by way of Swallows and Amazons, where the pressures of the plot test young people to their limits in an adult-free world.

Beth has the responsibilities of Acting Captain thrust upon her by Ship – on the grounds that she scored 0.5% higher in a recent Command Training exam than Vihaan, the more experienced candidate and, as it happens, the son of the sleeping Captain of the Orion. He resents her authority, even as his training requires him to obey her. Her other challenges include not only marauding Scrapers and Videshi, but also carrying out essential repairs to Orion without experienced technicians or fully functioning tools. There are betrayals and double dealings to be confronted along the way, as the Orion races towards a finale which finds a surprising touch of comedy – at the expense of adults – in the concluding pages. **GF**

14+ Secondary/Adult



A Throne of Swans

★★★★

Katharine & Elizabeth Corr, Hot Key, 326pp, 978 1471408755, £7.99 pbk
After the death of her father, Aderyn becomes proctor of the dominion of Atratys and one step nearer to inheriting the kingdom ruled by her uncle, a despot. The ruling nobility have the power to shapeshift into birds – each according to their family group. Aderyn is a swan but has not been able to transform since the death of her mother when they were both attacked by hawks.

The trauma has physically and mentally scarred her but she must hide her disability otherwise she will be exiled from the kingdom. There are strict rules and penalties for those who can fly and those who can't. Up until now Aderyn has been kept safe in her father's castle but she realises the only way she can find the answers to her mother's death is to go court to the Silver Citadel to meet her uncle and cousins despite the terrible danger this puts her in. She is unprepared and naive but with determination, her trusty servant and childhood friend Letya by her side, plus the help of Lancelin, the somewhat cynical and patronising son of her father's steward she sets off on her quest. Once there she begins to uncover a web of treachery, intrigue and deceit and realises she can trust no-one. Yet as she becomes closer to Lancelin she finds she is beginning to have feelings for him.

Loosely based on the *Swan Lake* story this first-person narrative does everything a good high fantasy novel should do. There is a flawed but fascinating heroine, an unfulfilled romance and a fight to regain a kingdom ruled over by an evil king. It is a highly visual story rich in detail with twists and turns aplenty and some excellent lines in witty dialogue. All the familiar tropes are there which at times makes the story just a little

predictable but fantasy fans will love this and will be eager for the sequel. **JC**

Jackpot

★★★★

Nic Stone, Simon & Schuster, 343pp, 978 1 4711 8690 5, £7.99 pbk

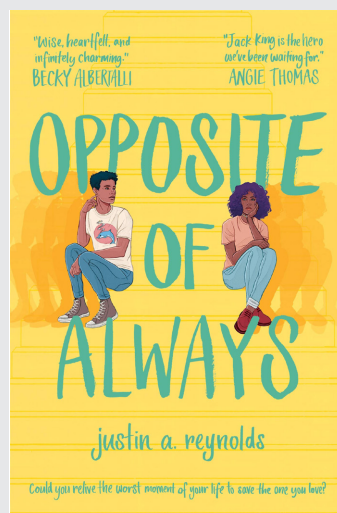
YA readers may well be familiar with novels set in New York City or on the West Coast, often featuring affluent homes. This is different. Rico lives in Norcross, a district of Metro Atlanta, Georgia. She's a High School Senior, a good student, no problems with her grades. But she's got no chance of going on to College. For a couple of years, she's worked long shifts after school and at weekends at the Gas 'n' Go convenience store, helping her Mama pay the rent on an apartment they can't afford. Her mother works 70 hour weeks as a cleaner, since she's determined to raise Rico and young son Jax in a good neighbourhood with good schools. There's no safety net for them; they can't afford Health Insurance and Mama won't apply for public assistance such as Medicaid. So when Jax is hospitalised for several weeks, Rico knows the bill for more than three hundred thousand dollars will put them out on the street. Rico doesn't have time to hang out with friends. Though she can't see it, we realise anger and resentment are never far away.

One day, the Mighty Millions Lottery Jackpot is: Two. Hundred. And. Twelve. Million. Dollars. (Look, it seems every YA novelist currently deploys full-stops this way, so why not?) There are two winning tickets, half the Jackpot apiece. And one of them was bought at the Gas 'n' Go in Norcross, and the ticket owner hasn't cashed it in. Rico thinks she knows who bought it - she's pretty sure she sold it to her. If she could track the buyer down, maybe she could alert her to her good fortune and maybe some of the winnings might come her way. So her search begins - miles of driving, tracing a taxi driver, visiting the Victorian Faith Chapel (unlike any Church a UK reader might know), meeting strange old ladies in strange old houses, pretending to be a pregnant prospective buyer touring homes with estate agents, and almost breaking into a storage unit to search through a deceased person's wardrobe. Always edging closer.

Rico is not alone. A coincidence on that fateful night at the Gas 'n' Go leads her to recruit Alexander ('Zan') Macklin, 'varsity quarterback, all round teen dream' and heir to a million dollar business producing the finest toilet paper in all America and possibly the World. While the novel is structured around the search for that ticket, it's more interestingly about the searches of Rico and Zan for themselves through each other. Their financial circumstances could not be

more different, but both feel they have no choices about what to do with their own lives. Just as Rico is absorbed by caring for Mama and Jax, Zan's path into heading up the toilet paper business is predetermined. The way his father sees things, there's no need for Zan to waste time going to College.

The narrative is punctuated by brief interjections from inanimate objects: the lost winning ticket, a taxi, a Waffle House Saltshaker, the sheets on Zan's bed. It's a device which readers might feel is contrived, jarring with the comic naturalism of the rest of Rico and Zan's story. Nic Stone's dialogue is charged with the super-fast wit YA readers expect, but there is a serious subtext. Rico hates Zan's arrogant assumptions - 'You just do whatever the hell you want'. He never asks, he simply expects her to accept his help, the rides in his upmarket jeep, his easy money and so on. But Rico's anger means she misses Zan's genuine kindness, and she's blind to his own confusions. On the other hand, he's exasperated by her stubborn pride. Each has much to give - to teach - the other, and that is very entertainingly done through a rapid narrative which culminates in a surprising revelation and an invitingly open ending. **GF**



Opposite of Always

★★★★★

Justin A. Reynolds, Macmillan Children's Books, 456pp, 978-1-5098-7004-2, £7.99 pbk

This timeslip romance is full of smart, sassy, well-observed dialogue. The conversational bounce between the four principal characters feels authentic and immediately engages the reader. Jack and Jillian have always been best friends but Jack has begun to feel much more for her. He can do nothing about this, however, as she is dating Jack's other best friend, Franny, who has both great physical strength and emotional vulnerability.

His father has been in prison several times and never shows his son affection or praises him for his many achievements. Jack, Kate and Franny are inseparable and fiercely loyal and so Jack knows he must say and do nothing about his romantic feelings.

Then events completely change Jack's feelings-he meets Kate and falls profoundly in love. The feeling rapidly becomes mutual, but there is a serious problem: Kate has sickle cell disease, which can take her life at any time. Jack is determined to save her and this propels the narrative into a Groundhog Day loop as he formulates one solution after another to the problem. Reynolds deftly juggles tension, comedy, love and friendship using effective tools-smart, sassy, well-observed dialogue; rounded, convincing characters and, until the final section, credible plot construction.

This is fast and furious stuff, threaded through with strong emotion which avoids the trap of sentimentality. Reynolds is an accomplished and inventive writer, which makes the rather strained final section rather a disappointment. Nevertheless, I relished reading this book and was sorry when it ended. **VR**

The Good Hawk

★★★★★

Joseph Elliott, Walker 348pp., 9781406385854, £7.99 pbk

Set in an alternative Skye, Scotland (Scotia), and Norveg (Norway) this story is told by three protagonists, notably including Agatha, who has Down's Syndrome. Although this is not specified in the text, the fact is mentioned in the blurb, and new characters that she meets notice immediately that she is different. Their low expectations of her and her abilities are soon shown to be unjust - she is the 'Good Hawk' of the title who is very good at being a lookout for her tribe and the sub-group, the Hawks, and ultimately it is her skills and actions that bring this part of the proposed trilogy to a satisfactory conclusion. Another important storyteller is Jaime, a young man who is full of fears and worries, specifically of the sea, which, as his designated sub-group is the Anglers, is embarrassing, but he discovers courage he didn't know he had, and emerges, with Agatha, as heroic. The third person, Nathara, only appears with strange poems in Part Two, when the action moves to Scotia. Her identity, and her importance, eventually become clear, but her part of the story ends in Norveg.

The tribe of the Clann-a-Tuath, divided into Hawks, Anglers and Wasps (builders), has long been self-sufficient, but the elders decree that a marriage must take place, something that has not happened

reviews

14+Secondary/Adult continued

for many years. (Children are brought up communally). Jaime has to marry a girl from the neighbouring island of Rasaay, in a deal that means that his tribe will get good weapons to defend themselves from the rumoured threat of the deamhain, who sound rather like Vikings. After the marriage, Jaime and his new young wife are set adrift to get to know each other, only to find that Agatha has smuggled herself aboard in an attempt to prevent the marriage that she knows Jaime does not want. On their return to the island they discover that the tribe has been betrayed, and the deamhain, people of Norveg, have killed the elders and captured the remaining people for slaves. They rescue an almost drowned Knutr, a Prince from Norveg, and determine to use him as a hostage to rescue the clan from captivity. He is dangerous and has to be kept tied up, but his knowledge is useful as they make their way to Norweg, across part of Scotia, where they encounter a friendly clan of Bo Riders (Highland bulls) and later, Nathara. Their adventures are scary, and characters do die, so this is definitely for Young Adults, and the blurb recommends 12+. Some of the dialogue is in an invented version of Old Norse, and this is as it would be when a person speaking one language meets a 'foreigner', but this adds to the authentic feel, and there is enough context to work out what is happening. This book ends at a pause in the longer story, but it is clear that there are loose ends to follow and more adventures to come.

Joseph Elliott's mother is a teacher specializing in Special Educational Needs, the family provided respite care for some of the children, and he worked in a SEN playscheme as a holiday job before graduating and becoming a teacher at Westminster Special School. The character of Agatha was inspired by some of the children he worked with, and he hopes that readers will learn not to judge by first appearance, but to understand that, whatever a person's strengths or weaknesses, they can achieve remarkable things. He writes well, and this is an absorbing story. **DB**

Yes No Maybe So

★★★★★

Becky Albertalli and Aisha Saeed, Simon and Schuster, 440pp, 978-1471184666, £7.99 pbk

Jamie and Maya are two Americans aged seventeen. Jamie is Jewish. Maya is Muslim. They have known each other since they were children, but haven't seen each other for several years. Jamie has the ambition one day to reach elected office. Jamie's cousin Gabe is already active in the political world. He works for Jordan Rossum, an aspiring Democrat congressman. But for Jamie there is a snag. He detests public speaking. His sister Sophie is aged thirteen and

according to Jewish custom is about to celebrate her Bat Mitzvah. Jamie is under acute pressure from his mother and his grandmother to propose the toast at the ceremony, a prospect that fills him with dread.

Meanwhile Maya's life is in turmoil. Her parents, who had always seemed well matched, have announced a trial separation. Her best friend, Sara, is about to depart for a university two hours away. Her parents want her to spend the summer vacation canvassing with Jamie on behalf of the Democrats. If she agrees, she will be rewarded with her own car. Albertalli and Saeed tell the story of how this political campaign unfolds and how the feelings of Jamie and Maya change.

Plenty of older people believe that young people have no interest in politics. Or if they are interested, the complexity of political life is beyond their understanding. This book busts that myth wide open. Its depiction of the political process, of the way these two young people become involved in the process, of the moral and ethical issues raised by a political campaign and of the profound influence today of social media on political decision-making – all this makes a fascinating read. The publication of this book comes at a time when in different countries and in the world at large, forces for change are being driven by younger and younger people. **RB**

Slay

★★★★★

Brittney Morris, Hodder, 318pp, 978 1 444 95172 1, £7.99 pbk

'By day, I'm an honours student at Jefferson Academy. At night, I turn into the Nubian goddess most people know as Emerald.' The speaker of the novel's opening lines is seventeen-year-old Kiera Johnson. She and her sister Steph are the only two Black girls at the Academy in Bellevue, Washington State. Kiera and her long-term boyfriend, Malcolm, transferred to Jefferson from Belmont, where 50% of the students were Black. Malcolm's transfer was not voluntary – his lip still carries the scar from the fight that got him expelled from Belmont. Kiera's doing well academically, has several college offers already and she and Malcolm plan to share a life in Atlanta during their college years, though they expect to enrol at different universities. Her Nubian night-time persona inhabits the hugely successful VR gaming world of SLAY, with half-a-million account holders worldwide. Even Steph, her parents, and her best friend Harper don't know that for three years Kiera has been developing Emerald's universe in partnership with 'Cicada', who lives in Paris. Kiera doesn't know Cicada's real life name – the two have never met outside SLAY.

At the core of Brittney Morris's novel, driving the story, there is a dilemma. SLAY is designed to be exclusively for

Black gamers. When Kiera speaks within the game as Emerald, she says, "We are here first and foremost to celebrate Black excellence in all its forms, from all parts of the globe." That's the principle on which Kiera developed SLAY; the game is for Black players only. No Whites allowed, and herein lies the conflict and, maybe, the catastrophe which challenges the game and Kiera herself. SLAY hits the international media when a teenager is murdered in Kansas City over an argument (concerning SLAY's trading currency) arising within the game. Suddenly the media is all over Kiera's project. Ethics Professors are invited onto TV chat shows to talk about whether excluding Whites is racist and, as the murder may demonstrate, dangerously discriminatory. Both of Kiera's worlds explode into controversy and publicity. Before long, she is personally under threat from a troll.

I need here to step away from any attempt to reflect the narrative closely. The story is very tightly plotted – argued, even; which is remarkable in that Hodder's blurb tells us that Morris wrote this 318 page book in eleven days. I couldn't do the storyline justice in this reviewing space. In fact, I began to wonder, can I do the novel justice at all? You could say that implied readers of SLAY need to be sensitive to nuanced discussion of contemporary Afro-American matters – particularly in the experience of young people. Also, readers would surely take more from the text if they are familiar with VR Gaming, though a novice (such as myself) can learn something from the blow-by-blow accounts of duels in the SLAY world, where duelling is the main purpose of playing.

My own reviewing position here seems problematic, at least to me. Since the 1970s, many teachers and others interested in literature for young readers thought increasingly in terms of 'what a reader brings to a book' interplaying with what a book offers to a reader. (Subsequently, the National Curriculum, with its inappropriate need to measure and assess responses to literature, inhibited such an awareness when teaching literature.) Here, what I bring to this novel includes areas of ignorance, which do not limit my interest, but do raise concerns about fairness to the author in reaching any detailed evaluation of it. The questions SLAY raises are complex and difficult to resolve; and – to be just a little evaluative – embodied in an unconventional and arresting narrative. One aspect of the novel may serve as an example: for me, some of the duelling sequences were overlong – too detailed; perhaps we are used to the graphic speed of the visual in handling such action. Yet, as soon as I write that, I am unsure that I have a sense of how young readers used to gaming would judge those duels.

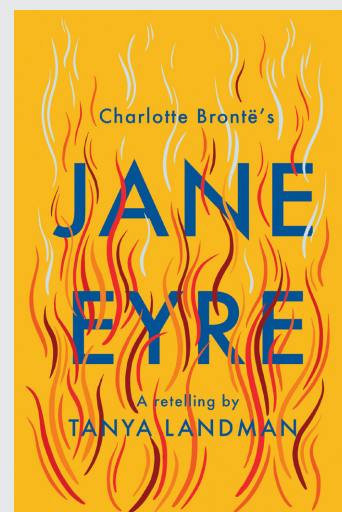
In this instance, the five stars at the head of this review are meant to indicate a strong recommendation that readers should try this unusual and passionate book. For its own sake – and also as a novel which (as

far as I know) will take UK readers into areas they are unused to finding in print. **GF**

Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre: a retelling by Tanya Landman

★★★★★

Tanya Landman, Barrington Stoke, 120pp, 978-1781129128, £7.99 pbk
Charlotte Brontë's great work is of course present on many a school and college syllabus. It is widely read and studied by pupils at older levels. In this little Barrington Stoke book Landman has set out on a notable task – to make the famous work accessible to younger readers who may not have the literary expertise needed to tackle the story in its original form. Such young readers may still benefit from an understanding of the novel, its characters and its ideas.



The task of adapting the masterwork for a new readership is far from simple. For example, Landman has felt obliged to use language appropriate to the period in which the book is set. But at the same time the language must not strike young readers as hopelessly archaic and alien. The same is also true of the social conventions of the time. Young readers must be led to understand such conventions and appreciate how they are applied to the lives of the protagonists without the book resorting to a didactic tone – more a history lesson than a novel.

There is of course a familiar objection to literary creations of the type Landman has attempted. The criticism is that the work is unduly compressed. Some significant episodes in the original text are glossed over in one line. The same criticism always arises when favourite works are adapted for TV or the cinema. On the whole however it is important to recognise the innovatory courage Barrington Stoke has demonstrated launching what we hope will become a series. The publisher seems to have identified a significant market niche. This reviewer has her own favourites that might be included in the series catalogue. No doubt all readers of this review will have their own mental lists. **RB**

Classics in Short No.139 What Katy Did

Brian Alderson wonders what on earth did Katy do to become a classic?

Little Women redivivus

is unsurprising. Every generation presents those young ladies for itself (the current manifestation is about the seventh movie) and praise remains undiminished. It would though be interesting – but impossible – to know what the tally of female to male readers might be of this Weltbuch since its publication in two parts in 1868-9. (And how many commentaries do you think have been written on it by masculine critics?)

Less puzzlement

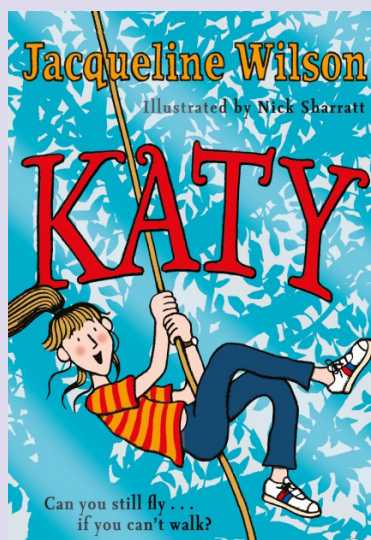
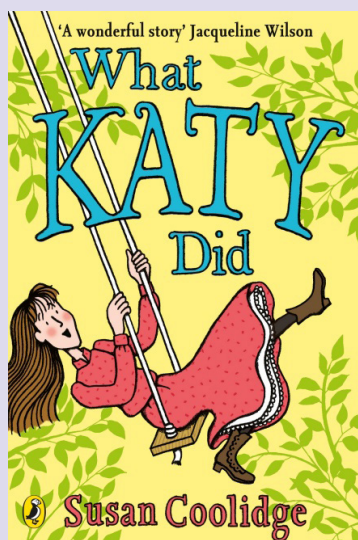
need arise over its immediate successor which came from another authoress known to Alcott's Boston editor, Thomas Niles of Roberts Brothers, who prevailed upon her to produce for them another family story for girls so as to cash in on the unexpected runaway success of Miss Alcott's book. Thus, in 1872, drawing upon her own childhood memories, Sarah Chauncey Woolsey turned out for him **What Katy Did**, writing under the name of Susan Coolidge.

In this case however,

we have to do with six siblings, almost all younger than the March girls and with the focus on Coolidge's female characters further sharpened by their centrality, the two small boys of the family being mere cyphers. (This would later probably have affected the character of its readership. I doubt if any boy reader worth his salt would have looked at more than three pages of the book.) The "Jo" of the story is, of course, twelve-year old Katy, and she is paired with her younger sister Clover and partnered throughout by the neighbour's daughter, Cecy. Next one down in the pecking order is the interesting eight-year old Elsie, about whose character Miss Coolidge does not seem able to make up her mind. She is introduced as 'the odd one' between her adventurous elders and the 'babies' but our author is too kind-hearted to allow her to be properly scorned so that her own doings may claim a minor denouement of their own. In any case, we have been told at the start that our subject is first and foremost what Katy gets up to.

These siblings

are the children of Dr Carr and, since their mother has died some years before,



they are being brought up by his sister, Aunt Izzie, 'sharp-faced and thin...and very neat and particular about everything' – temperamentally at odds with the children but by no means dragonish. For the first half of the book she serves as a counterweight to the varied exploits of Katy which, for readers of today, are pretty lacklustre and require the dramatic turning-point at the centre of the story to inject a larger purpose to the whole affair. Disobeying orders, Katy takes herself off to a newly installed swing which is awaiting the replacement of a cracked staple before use and in the course of her energetic activities on it, 'like flying she thought', she comes to grief and injures her back.

The four years

that follow this calamity see the conversion of our mildly tearaway Katy into a bed-bound responsible mortal. In this she is much helped by Cousin Helen, whose own suffering after a near fatal accident provides occasion for a disquisition on the Lessons of Pain (no Red Room here) and the momentary dream intrusion of the Teacher who will always be on hand if the lessons seem too hard. The patience that is demanded forms a basis for allowing Katy to grow into a carer for her family after the sudden death of Aunt Izzie. At first she practises housekeeping from her bedroom until, with her injury slowly healing, she graduates to a wheelchair and then to a final recovery as the 'Heart of the House'.

Such was the immediately successful reception

of **What Katy Did** that, within a year, Coolidge published a sequel, **What Katy Did at School**, which was, in turn followed by what she did next when she is taken on a trip to Europe (possibly

modelled on **Little Women: Part Two**). The three books were followed by excursions into later adult events in **Clover** and **In the High Valley**, but the original trilogy has taken unto itself the status of a unit and has retained a marketing appeal carrying its very dated substance down to the present time in various 'classic' series. (At least thirty editions have come out since the war, with the books seemingly better known in Britain than in the United States).

An instance of its regular reprinting

can be found in the publication in 2015 of a Puffin edition of **What Katy Did** with an Afterword by Jacqueline Wilson in which she recorded her own pleasure in reading the book as a child – 'such fun and very easy to read' – but confessed to what is a very understandable unease about what looks like Katy's rather miraculous recovery from her severe but unspecified injury. (Come to think of it, the injured Clara in **Heidi** enjoys a similar recovery). As a result, Jacqueline Wilson – master storyteller that she is – conceived for the idea of writing a modern Katy, mirroring many of the events and incidents of the original (and naturally illustrated by chapter headpieces by Nick Sharratt). We are now in a land of t-shirts and mobile phones and people-carriers and when our modern Katy defies her stepmother, Izzie, by going off and making a rope swing in a tree her fall results in authentic paraplegia that will last for good and all. Distant Miss Woolsey from nineteenth century Ohio may loom in the background but Wilson doesn't just give us a drastic clinical truth that she avoided but a recreated story for everyone."

What Katy Did is published by Puffin Classics, 978-0241372326, £6.99 pbk.

Katy by Jacqueline Wilson, illustrated by Nick Sharratt, is published by Puffin, 978-0141353982, £6.99 pbk.

Brian Alderson is founder of the **Children's Books History Society** and a former Children's Books Editor for **The Times**. His latest book **The 100 Best Children's Books**, Galileo Publishing, 978-1903385982, £14.99 hbk, is out now.