



Beyond the Secret Garden: Books for Everyone

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How to make sure there's something for *everyone* on your holiday gift list

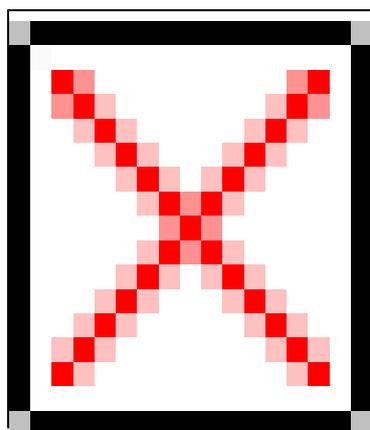
Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O'Connor find a way to include everyone on your holiday gift list.

The holiday season is an important time for children's books. With that in mind, we thought we would offer a list of children's books that suit a variety of reading tastes and needs. We would especially like to stress that the books we list below are for ALL children, and not just children from similar backgrounds to the main characters in these books.

2019 has been a great year for books by and about BAME people and there is a sense that some of the initiatives of the past few years are just beginning to impact UK children's publishing. By way of example, two authors who were first featured in 2017's **A Change Is Gonna Come** (Stripes) had superb debuts - Aisha Bushby's magical middle-grade **A Pocketful of Stars** [4] (Egmont), and Yasmin Rahman's YA tale of friendship and survival **All The Things We Never Said** [5] (Hot Key).

We've organised the list by genre, and tried to highlight books that have appeared or won awards in the last year or so, and some books you might have missed. We encourage you to seek out your local independent children's bookshop, if you're lucky enough to have one, or independent online services such as **Letterbox Library** [6], as they can offer further suggestions and great books to suit your child.

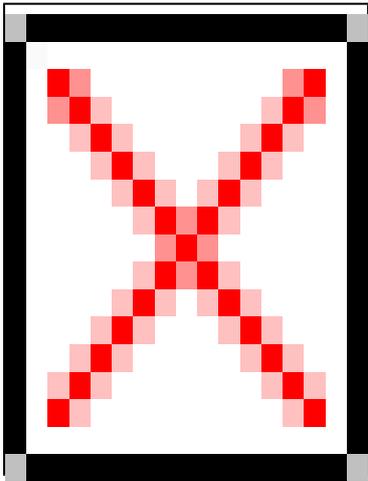
Picture Books



Fifty years after the first moonwalk, Ken Wilson-Max's **Astro Girl** [7] (Otter-Barry 2019) gives young children a chance to read and dream about their own experience in space. **Look Up!** [8] (Penguin 2019) by Nathan Bryan and Dapo Adeola is a beautifully illustrated story featuring Rocket, who is fascinated by the stars and is eager to convince her big brother Jamal that there is a whole universe to discover beyond his phone. **My Hair** (Faber & Faber 2019), written by Hannah Lee and illustrated by Allen Fatimaharan, combines the excitement of a forthcoming birthday party with a celebration of the wealth of Black hairstyles for women and men. Breanna J. McDaniel's **Hands Up!** (Dial 2019)

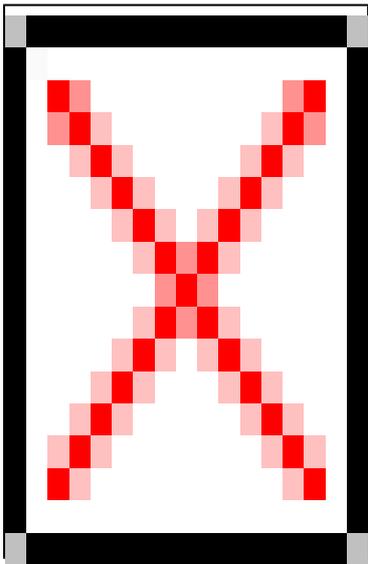
reimagines a potentially frightening phrase through the activities of a young girl experiencing an ordinary day and a protest march. For the very youngest booklovers, and those learning their letters, Atinuke's [B is for Baby](#) [9] (Walker 2019) delights with its pictures of an adorable toddler falling into a basket of bananas that become breakfast. Nadia Shireen's follow up to **Billy and the Beast**, is the hilarious **Billy and the Dragon** (Jonathan Cape 2019).

Folk and Traditional Tales



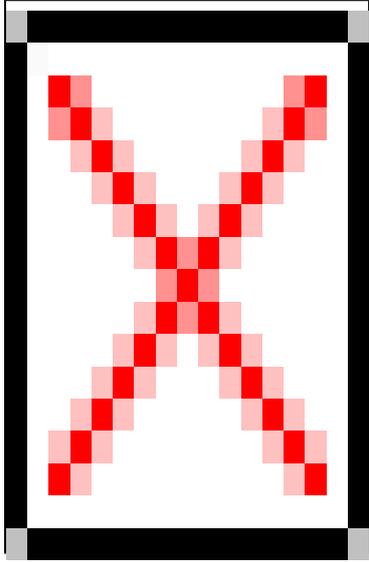
Poonam Mistry, whose beautiful and complex illustrations for Chitra Soundar's **You're Safe with Me** gained a **Kate Greenaway** nomination last year, has created a remarkable visual experience with **How the Stars Came to Be** (Tate 2019). Soundar and Mistry have combined again for **You're Snug with Me** (Lantana 2018). Amin Hassanzadeh Sharif's graffiti illustrations are the ideal complement to Sally Pomme Clayton's retelling of [The Phoenix of Persia](#) [10] (Tiny Owl 2019). **Leah's Star ? A Nativity Story** (Alanna Max 2019) written by Margaret Bateson-Hill and beautifully illustrated by Karin Littlewood tells the nativity story through the eyes of the innkeeper's daughter. **Under the Great Plum Tree** (Tiny Owl 2019), written by Sufiya Ahmed and illustrated by Reza Dalvand draws upon the Ancient India text **The Panchatantra**.

Historical Fiction



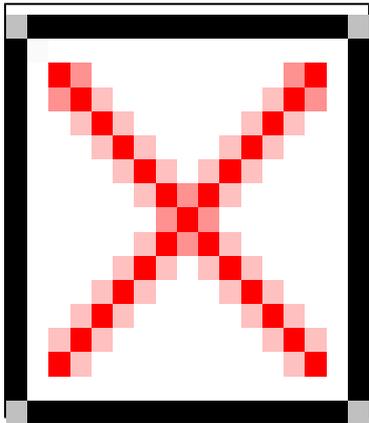
Catherine Johnson's **Freedom** (Scholastic 2018) won the **Little Rebels Award** this year, and for good reason; it intertwines one boy's experience as a Black Briton with the fate of the Zong Case in the 18th century, keeping readers involved in historical events by letting them witness it through Nat's, the main character's, eyes. Scholastic has also published three books in the Voices series, looking at historical periods through child characters of colour. The most recent of these to appear is E. L. Norry's **Son of the Circus, A Victorian Story** about the 19th century circus owner, Pablo Fanqué. Patrice Lawrence's **Diver's Daughter, A Tudor Story** and Bali Rai's [Now Or Never, A Dunkirk Story](#) [11] also published in 2019 were featuring in an earlier *Beyond the Secret Garden* column.

Middle-Grade Fiction



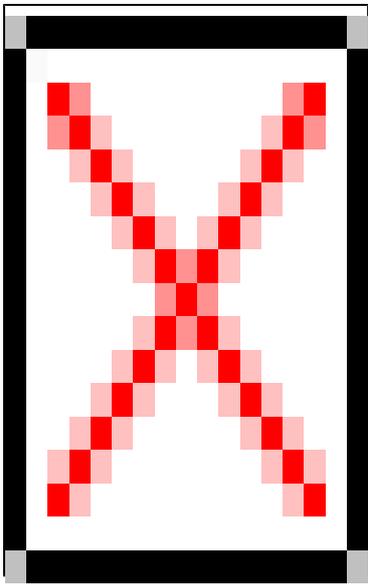
Sharna Jackson's [High Rise Mystery](#) [12] (Knights Of 2019) reinvigorates the 'detective duo' trope in children's literature by placing the action in an urban tower block, where two Black British sisters solve the crime. **Toad Attack** by Patrice Lawrence and illustrated by Becka Moor (Barrington Stoke 2019) is great fun and written in very accessible language. **Planet Omar - Accidental Trouble Magnet** written by Zanib Mian and illustrated by Nasaya Mafaridik (Hachette 2019) should be read by anyone who enjoys the **Diary of a Wimpy Kid** and **Tom Gates** series. In a similar vein, **Cookie and the Most Annoying Boy in the World** is the first children's book from former Blue Peter presenter [Konnie Huq](#) [13] (Picadilly 2019). [Little Badman and the Invasion Of The Killer Aunties](#) [14] written Humza Arshad and Henrey White and illustrated by Alesksei Bitskoff (Penguin 2019) features Humza Khan, an ambitious eleven year old rapper.

Nonfiction



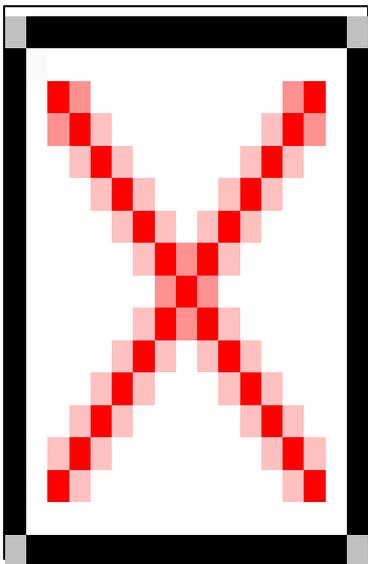
Combining poetry and science, James Carter and Nomoco's **Once Upon a Raindrop** (Caterpillar 2018) will please readers who respond to words, the workings of nature, and stylish illustration. Jeffrey Boakye and Darren Chetty's **What Is Masculinity? Why Does It Matter? And Other Big Questions** (Wayland 2019) is a timely exploration for children between the ages of 9 and 14.

Poetry



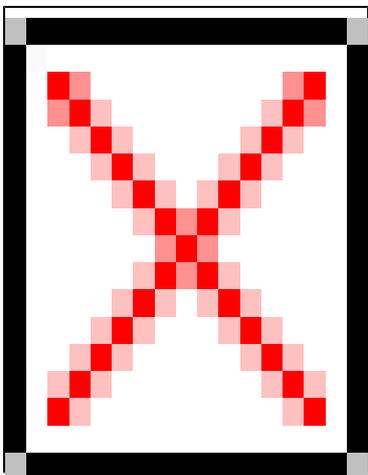
In this year of heightened concern over the environment, [Joseph Coehlo](#) [15]'s **A Year of Nature Poems** (Wide Eyed Editions 2019) gives young poets and naturalists beautiful images of the nature around them. For an older audience, Sophia Thakur has been a rising star of the spoken word scene for some time now. **Somebody Give This Heart A Pen** (Walker 2019) is her debut collection and explores issues of identity, difference, perseverance, relationships, fear, loss and joy.

Science Fiction and Fantasy



[Where the River Runs Gold](#) [16] by Sita Brahmachari (Orion 2019) is not only a beautifully written adventure of two children trying to find their way home through a dystopian world, it carries a timely environmental message as well. Jasbinder Bilan's debut novel, **Asha and the Spirit Bird** (Chicken House 2019) is also a journey adventure with a sense of mysticism pervading it. [The Tunnels Below](#) [17] (Pushkin 2019) is as a gripping fantasy debut novel from Nadine Wild-Palmer.

Young Adult



YA readers are spoiled for choice this year. Alex Wheatle's **Home Girl** (Atom 2019), Elizabeth Acevedo's **With The Fire on High** (Hot Key 2019), and Patrice Lawrence's **Rose, Interrupted** (Hachette 2019) all focus on teenaged girls trying to navigate their worlds. Dean Atta's **The Black Flamingo** (Hodder 2019) beautifully details the story of a gay Black teen as a novel-in-verse. Malorie Blackman's **Crossfire** (PRH 2019) continues the story of a racially divided world she first created in **Noughts and Crosses**. Both Nikesh Shukla's **The Boxer** (Hodder 2019) and Savita Kalhan's **That Asian Kid** (Troika 2019) have teenage boys deciding how to confront racism and find acceptance. For readers who appreciate surrealism in both story and illustration, Shaun Tan's short story collection, [Tales from the Inner City](#) [18] (Walker Studio 2018) is sure to satisfy. **The Million Pieces of Neena Gill** (Penguin 2019) is Emma Smith Barton's first novel for young adults and is a tense and moving look at teenage mental health. **Kick The Moon** by Muhammed Khan (Macmillan 2019) confirms Khan as an important voice in contemporary YA. **Oh My Gods** by Alexandra Sheppard (Scholastic 2019) is a smart reworking of Ancient Greek mythology, telling the story of half-mortal London teenager Helen. **Becoming Dinah** by Kit De Waal (Bellatrix 2019) is a road-trip coming of age YA debut from the author of **My Name is Leon**. Yasmin Rahman's YA debut [All the Things We Never Said](#) [5] (Hot Key) is a moving tale of friendship told from multiple viewpoints.

Details of all the books mentioned [can be found here](#) [19].

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

Darren Chetty is 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.

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