

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

No.224

May 2017

the children's book magazine online



Authorgraph interview:
Elizabeth Wein

Steve Lenton

Siobhan Dowd's legacy

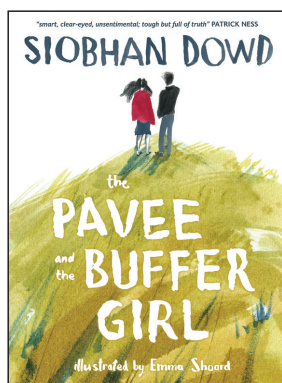
Awards: CKG
and the **CLIPPA**

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COVER STORY

This issue's cover illustration features **The Pavee and the Buffer Girl** by Siobhan Dowd and Emma Shoard. Thanks to **Barrington Stoke** for their help with this May cover.



editorial

What a long time a month is in politics. After the turmoil of last year just as the landscape was beginning to clear, a General Election looms. The national parties once more flex their muscles and voters look anxiously as the manifestos are launched. The issues attracting the attention of voters tend to be what are seen as the big issues – the NHS, immigration, employment, taxes. Books do not often get mentioned, and those whose business is books and information are on the whole invisible. CILIP is using the **Facts Matter** campaign asking political parties and candidates to endorse the vital role of facts and evidence in public life, targeting policy priorities through the three connected policy goals: ambition, opportunity and fairness. These are big concepts and they are relevant to all the major issues – not least to the question dominating the polls – Brexit. The consequences of Brexit will affect business, and that includes the publishing world – the effect on the profits as trading routes become less flexible, markets narrower, as the exchange rates become less stable. It will affect the workforce especially those who have come to the UK from other countries and have adopted this country as their home. Here it touches on personal lives. For Axel Scheffler who arrived in the UK in the '80s, 'The UK has been my home...and I intended to stay...My future as an EU citizen in this country has been put into question...I myself and many of my fellow Europeans in the UK are seriously considering whether we shall stay. It doesn't feel as if we are wanted any longer'.

Other implications are more subtle. This is a time when issues around diversity, representation and inclusion are being taken up. When the low number of books in translation published for young people is being challenged and concepts such as empathy are being explored, Brexit implies a turning away, a drawing back, a narrower focus. This is not what children's authors or librarians working with young people want or need. There is a real danger that publishers and the book-buying public will turn back to favouring the status-quo, taking the 'safe' road. As Axel says 'Culture needs openness to thrive'. There is now an imperative to ensure that writing and publishing for children do not fall into the insular trap. Organisations such as **IBBY (the International Board on Books for Young People)**, initiatives like **In Other Words** from **Book Trust**, publishers prepared to take risks, all promoting

diversity in the widest sense, become even more important. It is not just a question of ensuring young readers can find themselves represented in the books they read, it is also about welcoming different voices from different countries and cultures – of providing a wide-angled lens on the world and ensuring that different styles, different voices are part of the reading world for children. This is as pertinent to the information books that are being published. While fiction may allow an emotional assessment and connection, young people also need balanced information clearly presented and access to different viewpoints. They need spaces where this can happen – libraries, both public and school. Libraries, access to a wide range of books and information needs advocacy. Someone to shout.

'In my view, you can't call yourself a school if you don't have a library' – so Children's Laureate, Chris Riddell, making the case to the School's Minister, Nick Gibb at the **Department of Education** in February. Nor was this the first time he had raised his voice. The previous year, in an open letter, he demanded the government investigate school library closures. The original template for the role of Children's Laureate when it was established in 1999 was to create a role for someone who could act as a figurehead to promote the importance of children's literature and reading and respond to national issues. All nine Laureates have taken it seriously, none more so than Chris. His tenure has been marked by his activity – constantly on the move meeting people, young fans and adults, travelling around the UK and, indeed the world, linking up with the Laureates from other countries – most recently Leigh Hobbs from Australia, talking at International and local book festivals, meeting adults and children. As political cartoonist for the **Observer** he has had a presence outside the world of children's books, though the roles have been very separate. His has been a strong voice using his art as well as his words to get the message out. All the Laureates have been vocal, but by embracing contemporary technology, Chris has been especially visible across a wide range of social media. Now his tenure is drawing to an end. On 7th June, the day before the Election, Chris will hand over his crown. The Laureateship is ready to move on, active and political – and its role is even more important and relevant today.

<https://www.cilip.org.uk/advocacy-awards/advocacy-campaigns/facts-matter>

Margaret Mallett 1941-2017

We were very saddened to hear of the death of Margaret Mallett. During her career Margaret taught in primary schools and in the Education Department of **Goldsmiths College**. She wrote books on all aspects of Primary English and was Emeritus Fellow of **The English Association**. She wrote her first article for **Books for Keeps** in 1998 and each issue since has featured Margaret's perceptive, interesting and insightful reviews as well as many equally interesting feature articles. Her enthusiasm for and understanding of the books she wrote about inspired us all, and we will miss her very much indeed. A full tribute will appear in our July issue.

The English Association has established a new prize in memory of Margaret Mallett, the Margaret Mallett Award for Non-Fiction.



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The story of The Pavee and the Buffer Girl

Tony Bradman on the commission that launched the career of Siobhan Dowd.

In 2003 I was involved in an interesting project. I had persuaded Puffin Books to let me put together an anthology of short stories about racism. I'd done research and realised that no one seemed to have done anything quite like it before, so I felt sure there was a need for such a book. I came up with a title - **Skin Deep** - and set off on the quest to find great stories to put in it.

That proved pretty easy, at least to begin with. Writers were keen to contribute, and I soon had stories covering a wide range of characters and locations around the world. But I still kept looking, convinced that I needed one more story of a particular nature. Over the years I'd come to believe there was one group of people almost everybody felt it was OK to be racist about, and that was Travellers. So I thought it was very important to have a Traveller story in **Skin Deep**.

Finding someone to write such a story proved a lot harder than I had thought. I had two main criteria - I wanted to find a good writer, of course, someone who could tell a good tale and bring the characters to life. But I also wanted a writer who had real knowledge and experience of Travellers - someone who could be relied on to produce a story that was authentic in every way. I spent a lot of time looking for the right person, with no luck and then someone told me about a collection of Traveller songs and poems that had been published by the University of Hertford Press. The collection had an editor, and I finally managed to track her down. I sent her an email and then we talked on the phone.

She turned out to be very nice, and also to have done a lot of work with Travellers and other marginalised communities. We had a friendly conversation during which I asked her if she could find someone to write the story for me. She said she'd try - she knew some Travellers who were writers. Then a few days later she emailed me to ask if she could try and write a story herself - she had never published anything, but had always wanted to write. I liked her, so I said sure, why not?

She sent me the story a few weeks later. I remember that I read it sitting at my desk - and remember feeling enormously moved. It was a Romeo and Juliet tale about a Traveller boy and a girl from the local community, and I knew from the very first line - as you sometimes do - that it had been written by a wonderful writer, someone with a clear, original voice and a deep understanding of people. As soon as I had finished reading it, I called my agent, the excellent Hilary Delamere, and said that she had to meet this new writer.

The story was called *The Pavee and the Buffer Girl*, the writer was Siobhan Dowd, and her career took off immediately. She was in her mid-40s by then, and it was as if all the stories that she had

been wanting to write for years exploded out of her. She wrote four amazing novels in not much more than four years - **The London Eye Mystery** for top juniors, and the YA titles **A Swift Pure Cry**, **Solace of the Road** and **Bog Child**. Each book gained terrific reviews, she won 65 awards, and her books were all translated into many languages.

The brightest stars burn out quickly, though. Siobhan was diagnosed with breast cancer, and died aged 47 ten years ago - **Bog Child** was published after her death, and she became the first writer to win the Carnegie Award posthumously. She had also written a brief outline for a story which she couldn't write before she died, and the editor who had commissioned it - Denise Johnstone-Burt of Walker Books - asked Patrick Ness if he would be interested in writing the story. Patrick said yes, and **A Monster Calls**, a book about a boy who has to come to terms with the impending death of his mother, illustrated by Jim Kay has - quite rightly - been hugely successful all around the world, and made into a film with a screenplay by Patrick himself.

Siobhan's legacy is her books, and they go on, but there's an added dimension as well. Just before she died, Siobhan set up a charitable trust into which the future royalties from her books would be paid, and in her will she said she wanted the money to be used to

fund grants that would 'provide books to children from disadvantaged backgrounds'. Siobhan asked me and several of her friends to be trustees, and along with Siobhan's family we still run the trust that bears her name, the **Siobhan Dowd Trust**. We've made many grants to schools and organisations all over the country and in Ireland. You can see what we've done and what we're planning on our website - www.siobhandowd.com.

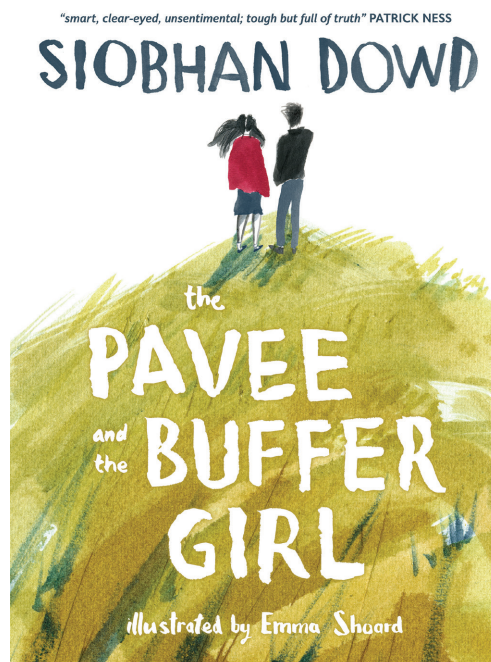
During all those years I've often thought of that very first story and I'm very proud to have published **The Pavee and the Buffer Girl** - I sometimes find it amazing to think of what has grown out of that commission for an anthology that's now out of print. But that's the way writing works - if a story really touches people, and *The Pavee and the Buffer Girl* certainly does that, then there's no telling where it will lead: 'Stories are the wildest things of all,' says the monster in **A Monster Calls**. 'Stories chase and bite and hunt.'

Now **The Pavee and the Buffer Girl** has a new life. Barrington Stoke has turned it into a book on its own, and what a book it is. They asked Emma Shoard to illustrate the story in colour, and her pictures are wonderful - full of the feeling that leaps out of the story and the characters that Siobhan created. As her first editor, I barely touched the story and Barrington Stoke have published it untouched. So anyone who reads it will be experiencing the story as Siobhan wanted it to be, and in so doing you'll encounter one of the best writers for children there has ever been.

Siobhan's novels are all available from Penguin Random House. **The Ransom of Dond** which also began life as a short story, is now published as a novella with illustrations by Pam Smy. **A Monster Calls** is available in various formats from Walker Books and I highly recommend the Special Collector's Edition (978-1-4063-6577-1), which includes essays by Patrick, illustrator Jim Kay, Denise Johnstone-Burt and Bayona, director of the film.

The Pavee and the Buffer Girl by Siobhan Dowd, illustrated by Emma Shoard, Barrington Stoke, 978-1-9113-7004-8, £12.99.

Tony Bradman's new book, **Anglo-Saxon Boy**, illustrated by Sam Hart, is published by Walker Books, 978-1-4063-6377-7, £5.99 pbk.



Celebrating poetry: with the CLiPPA and in the classroom

Poetry is a wonderful medium for engaging children in reading and writing, however it can often be overlooked in favour of more traditional stories or non-fiction in classrooms, bookshops and in the home.

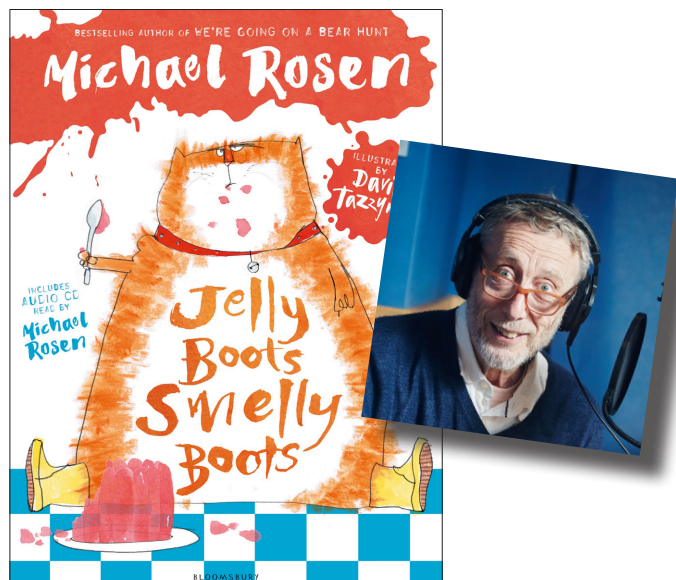
At the **Centre for Literacy in Primary Education**, says **Charlotte Hacking**, we are proud to be the National Poetry Centre for Primary Schools, and our **Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award (CLiPPA)** is the only national award to showcase poetry published for children. This year's shortlist celebrates a broad spectrum of what poetry is and what it can do for children.

Zim Zam Zoom! by James Carter, illustrated by Nicola Colton (Otter Barry Books) is a wonderful example of the joy of early play with rhyme and song. These are the foundations of a quality early reading experience. Joining in with nursery rhymes, jingles and songs are often children's first way in to connecting spoken words to print on the page.

Listening to poems read aloud and re-read, allows them to savour and try out parts of the language before joining in and performing themselves as the language becomes more familiar, such as in the use of onomatopoeia in Firework Poem.

The musicality of poems such as the title poem *Zim Zam Zoom!* and the get up and go poem *Splish! Splash! Splosh!* invite children to join in with choral performances and use their whole bodies to engage in the action on the page. Children can also learn, through poems such as *Hullabaloo*, where 'The cow goes Meow' and 'The mouse goes Moo', that language is to be experimented and played with, and that poetry is fun!

Michael Rosen is a master of language and word play. His collection **Jelly Boots and Smelly Boots**, illustrated by David Tazzyman (Bloomsbury) contains rhymes and laughs aplenty. Word play becomes more sophisticated with the witty *Imagine* and *Birdsong* exploring homographs and their meanings and *To*, which explores words within words and homophones in a tongue twisting tangle.



1 From **Tell Me: Children Reading and Talk and The Reading Environment** (Thimble Press, 2011)

The poems speak to children directly, encouraging deeper engagement and response. Subjects such as school in *Question Mark* and *The School Trip* and family in *Dad, In Bed* and *My Brother*, relate to children's immediate and prior experience, which allows them to make personal connections with poems. Engaging children in book talk¹ around poems helps them to respond more deeply. Ask children to share their likes and dislikes, ask questions and think about personal connections or familiar experiences that relate to what they have heard. You may then focus on discussing words or phrases that are particularly vivid or memorable or the effect of devices like repetition and rhyme.

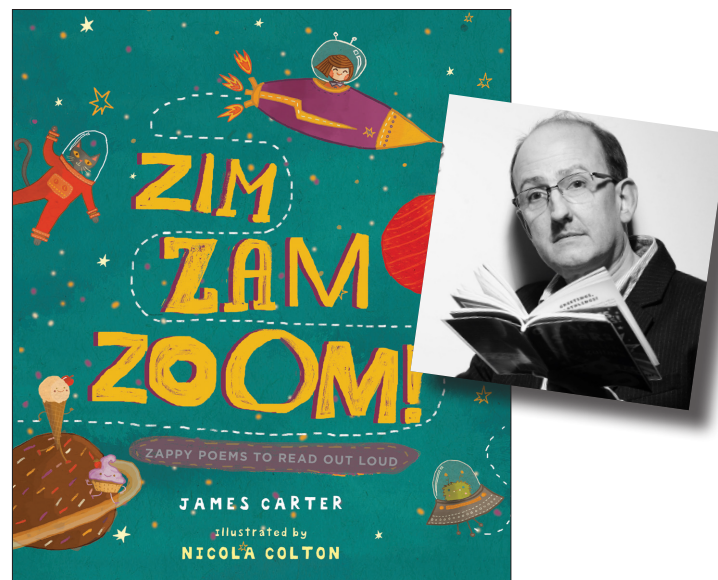
The collection also draws attention to the importance of words. We are told in *Words* that 'words are presents that we give to each other' and poems such as *The STOP Button*, *Metroland* and *Metal Covers on the Pavement* remind us that words are all around us for us to make our own meaning from. The collection also contains a wealth of narrative poetry. Poems such as *The Dam on the Beach*, *Robots* and *The People* place the thought of writing about experiences, happy, sad and familial as an important activity.

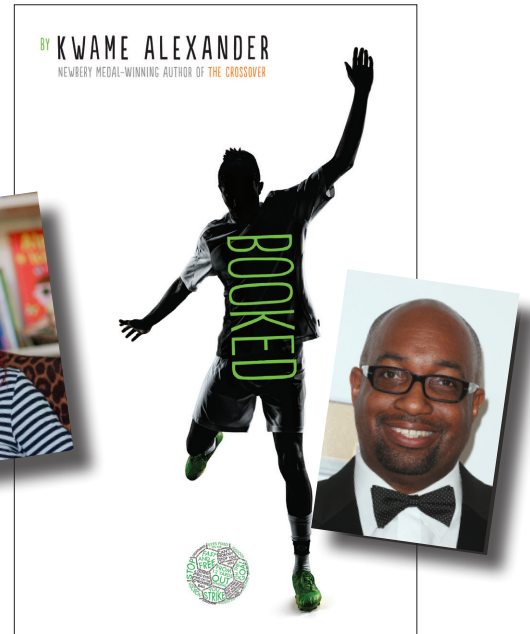
Kate Wakeling's debut collection **Moon Juice**, illustrated by Elina Braslina (The Emma Press) is a wonderful exploration of poetry across a range of forms. As children's reading of poetry develops, they should be encouraged to re-read and look at poems in different ways. Multiple readings will help young readers explore the ideas and feelings at the heart of a poem.

Encourage children to read poems aloud to hear their sounds and musicality. The lyricism of poems like *Hamster Man* and *Dodo* revisit the musicality of poetry and children may be inspired to explore the rhythm and rhyme of such poems by performing to beats and music. They may even be inspired to write lyrics of their own.

They should also look at the way the poem is laid out on the page; the white spaces, the shapes it makes and what this adds to our understanding of the ideas or feelings within the poem or the way it could be performed. The wonderful ode to the *Telescope*, for example, celebrates the form of the object throughout its presentation.

The collection also challenges children to look at what defines poetry. The brilliant *Hair Piece* looks like a narrative recount on the page but





contains an array of poetic devices such as assonance, alliteration and rhyme which clearly define this as prose poetry.

The long history of poetry as a medium and the influence of the classics of yesterday on the poets of tomorrow can be seen in Michaela Morgan's clever anthology **Wonderland: Alice in Poetry** (Macmillan). The collection not only shares a range of Lewis Carroll's original works but also the poetry that inspired him, such as the familiar *The Star*, more widely known now in its nursery rhyme form *'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star'*. It also brings together a range of new and unique poems by famous names such as Roger McGough and John Agard and inspiring new voices such as Shauna Darling Robertson.

Joshua Seigal's **Read Me**, is a wonderful reflection on the instructions Alice receives in *Wonderland* and their subsequent results, cleverly enhanced by the presentation of the text on the page in this concrete poem. It is also a powerful and emotive insight into the power of poetry on a reader; *'I am a poem. Read me and you'll grow'*.

Older children could begin to explore poetry as giving them a voice on issues pertinent to themselves and society in poems such as Shauna Darling Robertson's *Violent Vision* and Cheryl Moskowitz's *On Growing Up*. Deeper discussions around personal connections can take place after reading such poems, exploring the more profound messages contained within.

The incredible success of last year's **CLiPPA** and **Carnegie Medal** winner Sarah Crossan has enabled the verse novel to become a more widely profiled form. Kwame Alexander's **Booked** (Andersen Press) is a poignant and expertly crafted narrative in verse, showcasing a variety of poetic forms.

Blackout poetry is an incredibly engaging way of inspiring children to find meaning in language. Alexander uses the technique to great effect in sharing the struggle of his lead character, Nick Hall, with engaging in reading the classic **Huckleberry Finn**, ending up with the words *'Adventures of Huckleberry Finn reads jest (sic) like a funeral orgie I shoved it down the toilet.'* The power of poetry and in particular the verse novel on reluctant or disengaged readers can be seen in the transformation of Nick's attitude at the end of the story and his appreciation of the form. He relishes *'a lot of white space on the page'* and in the poem of the same name, describes Karen Hesse's powerful verse novel **Out of the Dust** as *'unputdownable'*.

Readers in upper primary and lower secondary will empathise with the issues Nick faces, not only in the midst of his parent's separation, but also in fitting in at school. Poems such as *Stand Up* and *Back to Life* speak to very real issues that children face on their journey into adulthood and discussions around these can help them reflect on their own behaviour and others around them through the exploration of issues faced by characters they are emotionally engaged with.

Clever changes in pace and rhythm showcase the highs of Nick's life on the soccer field in poems like *Gameplay* and the title poem *Booked*, against moments of despair in poems like *Chimichangas*. Form choice is used to great effect, illustrating how this helps enhance meaning. The use of Haiku for poems illustrating text messages between Nick and his mother in *Texts to Mom* helps give a sense of the staccato nature of the voice and enhances the sense of detachment between the characters.

Whoever scoops the ultimate prize at the award ceremony at The National Theatre in July, it is clear that we are winning in the drive to publish and celebrate a diverse variety of children's poetry – the best prize of all!

A wide range of resources including videos of shortlisted poets, teaching notes and information and information about poetic forms and devices can be found on CLPE's free poetryline website: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline>

Schools wishing to shadow this year's award and enter the shadowing competition for a chance to perform on the stage of the Olivier Theatre at the award ceremony in July alongside the shortlisted poets can find information about the shadowing scheme at: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/aboutus/news/register-now-free-clippa-2017-shadowing-scheme>

A summary of CLPE's findings on Poetry in Primary Schools can be downloaded at: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources>

The **CLiPPA** shortlist:

Booked, Kwame Alexander, Andersen Press 978-1-7834-4465-6, £7.99 pbk

Zim Zam Zoom!, James Carter, illustrated by Nicola Colton, Otter-Barry Books, 978-1-9109-5954-1, 311.99 pbk

Wonderland: Alice in Poetry, Michaela Morgan (editor), Macmillan, 978-1-5098-1884-6, £5.99 pbk

Jelly Boots, Smelly Boots, Michael Rosen, illustrated by David Tazzyman, Bloomsbury, 978-1-4088-7343-4, £14.99 hbk

Moon Juice, Kate Wakeling, illustrated by Elina Braslina, The Emma Press, 978-1-9101-3949-3, £8.50



Charlotte Hacking is the Learning Programmes Leader and member of the **CLiPPA** judging panel at **CLPE**, an independent UK charity dedicated to helping schools develop literacy learning that transforms lives.

Windows into illustration: Steve Lenton

Steve Lenton, well known as the illustrator of the **Shifty McGifty and Slippery Sam** books and for his illustrations for Frank Cottrell Boyce's novels, introduces his new picture book **Let's Find Fred**. An animator as well as illustrator, he explains the importance of creating character, and of maintaining the 'Lenton look'.

Style and process is something that every illustrator I know thinks about constantly before, during and after a book project. Artists have a LOT to consider and the decision making is endless, well, until a deadline is fast approaching! Decisions regarding a character's expression or clothing, decisions on colour and lighting and also choosing the correct overall style for each book is paramount.

I have been very lucky to have worked with a number of publishers recently on a lovely array of different picture book and fiction titles. This has been fantastic and incredibly challenging creatively as I get to experiment with slightly differing styles as each project requires something a little different each time. I hope that I am adaptive but never to the detriment of my innate sense of 'what I would do'. I need to keep everything I do looking 'Lenton.'

With all my other picture books thus far, the creative process, planning and design have taken a fairly traditional route but **Let's Find Fred** was rather different! I was wined and dined or rather 'caked and cola'd' by Scholastic's Picture Book Art Director Strawberry Donnelly at the Bologna Book Fair in 2015 with a loose concept for a Panda-based title.

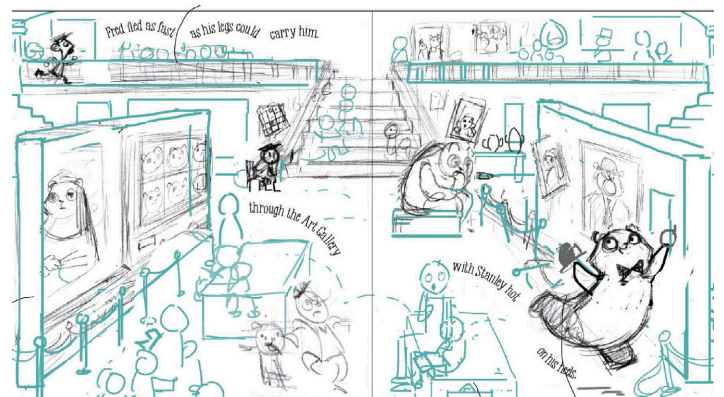
Strawberrie has always been a great supporter of my work and so it was lovely to finally work together on what started life as a very simple novelty, silhouette-centric book. As I started designing Fred and Stanley, the team fell in love with them and we soon realised that silhouettes, shadows and cut-outs weren't going to work for Fred – we needed to see lots more of him and in full glorious technicolour! I researched existing 'Spot the...' style of books, of which there is a huge variety, and then set about creating my own take on this genre of picture book.



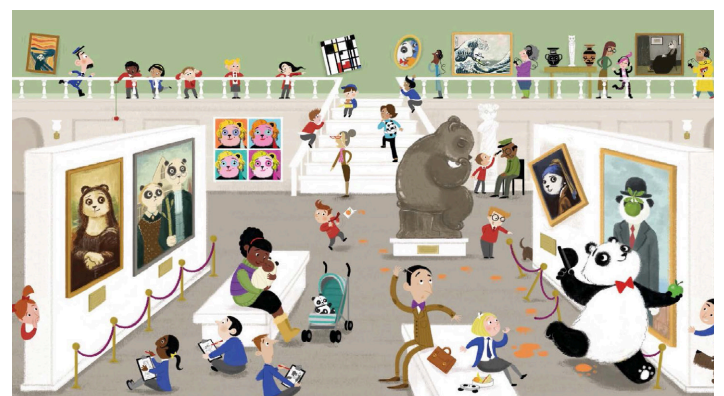
Editor Sophie Cashell joined me and Strawberry to discuss all the different places Stanley could chase Fred though and eventually the environments were chosen, one by one, and planned.

Each scene started as a thumbnail sketch with little or no detail in my sketchbook;

Then a more detailed rough;



Then the final artwork (with lots of colour changes along the way!);





The Fred style is more graphic, colourful and bold, with a stronger palette than my other books to date and it's been a real challenge to get all the details and humour in there with such small characters. I can never just draw a character to fill a gap, they have to have a reason for being in the scene and therefore need their own mini narrative. Fred evolved organically into a really fun, interactive book

with an irresistible 'moving-eyes' cover and giant fold out Panda Party spread as a finale.

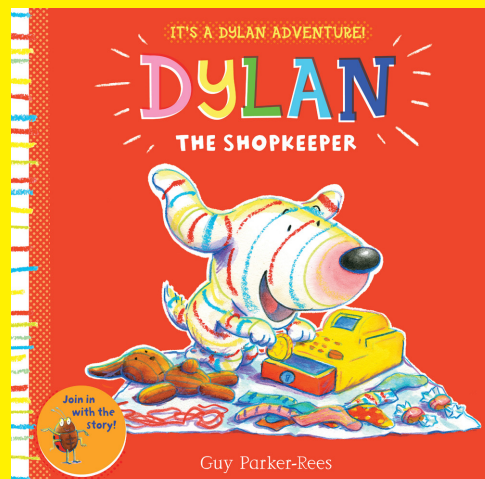
This book really is a joy to share and I'm currently on a book tour with my new Panda pal - do look out for us!

Let's Find Fred is published by Scholastic, 978-1-4071-6611-7, £6.99 pbk.

Picture books to keep your summer warm!



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© 2017 Guy Parker Rees



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Authorgraph No.224

Elizabeth Wein
Interviewed
by Anna James

Elizabeth Wein's new novel, **The Pearl Thief**, may technically be a companion book to her 2012 megahit **Code Name Verity**, but it is resolutely its own story. It follows Julie, one half of the duo at the heart of Wein's Carnegie Medal-shortlisted book, years before those events are set in motion and readers can happily come to **The Pearl Thief** knowing nothing of what lies in store for Julie during the Second World War.

Here we get a younger and more carefree Julie, returning from boarding school to her home in rural Scotland for the last summer at the family estate before it is sold to raise much-needed money. Add in an accident, a host of potentially suspicious characters and some missing pearls and you have an old-school mystery book. Wein has long wanted to write a proper mystery story and the urge to revisit Julie was irresistible: 'I'm such a fan of classic mysteries, and I love the 1930s, between-the-wars setting and the character of Julie just presented herself because she would have been in her teens then. I absolutely loved writing her narrative voice, it was so easy to channel.'

Although Julie will be familiar to many readers, **The Pearl Thief** isn't a prequel in any traditional sense; when it comes to the plot there's barely any foreshadowing: 'I tried very hard not to be heavy-handed. I left the war out, even though there would have been rumblings of war around them. The story is very insulated from that - it's a separate story. But Julie is the same and this is where the prequel quality comes in - you see why she develops into the character that she becomes.'

'It's easy to talk about the book in terms of Julie's privilege, but that's not something she or anyone around her would have applied to her situation'

Although Julie's family are dealing with financial constraints, they are still a wealthy, titled family and Julie is forced to reevaluate what that really means in **The Pearl Thief**: 'It's interesting because I don't believe the word privilege was in use at the time. It's easy to talk about the book in terms of Julie's privilege, but that's not something she or anyone around her would have applied to her situation. So it was a concept I was dealing with very consciously, though not able to articulate it as such for any of the characters. The language of equality changes all the time - every term we use becomes loaded with negative connotations and then we have to get rid of it and find another one.'

The book covers big ideas of privilege and prejudice, as well as Julie's burgeoning sexuality, but at its core **The Pearl Thief** is resolutely a mystery. Although several of Wein's previous novels have a thrillery sort of feel to them ('A lot of my novels are kind of mysteries - **Code Name Verity** even won an Edgar, which is supposed to be for the best mystery!') with clues and reveals and plot twists, but writing an old-school mystery proved to be its own challenge: 'I knew what the

big twist at the end was, it was how I was going to get there that I had trouble with! It was unbelievably hard to pull it all together and keep the tension up.'

Wein talks about having to research how long bodies deteriorate in water, how easy chimneys are to climb, and how to fish for pearls among other more niche queries - she also mentions finding a note to herself that said only 'LEGS' in capital letters which she couldn't remember anything about. When she thought she was about there, and was two full drafts and five different editors in, a new editor read it and suggested a tweak on the reveal: 'And I was like "oh my god yes!" - and of course that changed the entire plot and I went back and rewrote the whole book in six weeks and it just made so much more sense.'

The problem with writing mysteries is trying to see it from a reader's perspective when you know all the answers: 'I honestly don't know what it looks like to someone who isn't me writing it, what it looks like to a reader who comes to it fresh. I don't know where their minds go as they're working out the mystery and trying to figure out who did it. You have to give it to someone who hasn't read it yet and let them have a look. It was so hard; I just kept flailing and the timing kept going wrong - it was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be.'





What Wein's ended up with though is a tightly drawn mystery full of tension and genuine surprises. Julie finds herself embroiled in a mystery with deeper roots that she initially realises, one that incorporates family secrets, class tensions and a local family of travellers. Wein did plenty of research into the Scottish traveller community; there are several autobiographies from the time

The Pearl Thief which she read. She also interviewed some of the authors: 'I spoke to Jess Smith [who wrote an account of her childhood as a Scottish traveller] after I'd written the first draft and she actually had quite a bit to add; not just in terms of bringing the traveller sections in line, but also with the plot! It was a fun collaboration.'

When I ask Wein if this is the last we've seen of Julie, she laughs: 'I don't want to be seen as getting everything I can out of this character, and to a certain extent I think people like to have a bit of mystery to her... but I do have ideas, I love writing her!' But Wein has put Julie to bed for at least the moment and is working on a handful of other projects; two of which are in the middle of contract negotiations and so still under wraps. The project she can talk about is a middle grade non-fiction book about the women who flew as combat pilots for the Soviet Union during the Second World War. It's being published by HarperCollins in the US and is about to start looking for a British publisher.

Although Wein dabbles in other markets, she sees herself firmly as a YA author despite being regularly told she's wrong about that: 'I'm constantly getting people saying this book isn't YA about everything I write! The characters are too old, or there's too much violence.'

'I've always seen myself as a YA writer - why would I be anything else!'

I've always seen myself as a YA writer - why would I be anything else!' Wein is, though, very careful about the way she writes potentially controversial subjects: 'I do feel a responsibility for things that I'm writing about - a responsibility to tell the truth. But you'll never get graphic scenes of torture - or sex - from me. You get my characters' emotions, their reactions, their interactions, but no actual graphic violence.'

The Pearl Thief does have distinctly less torture scenes than many of Wein's previous books: 'My books are always miserable! Well maybe not miserable, but certainly intense. There's a darkness in them, and I think this one has a lot more light. It was a fun book for me to write and I hope people will enjoy reading it - but if there's a message it's one of tolerance, and appreciation of the things we have that we take for granted.'

The Pearl Thief is published by Bloomsbury, 978-1408866610, £7.99 pbk.

Code Name Verity is published by Electric Monkey, 978-1405278423, £7.99 pbk.



Anna James is a writer and journalist. Her debut children's novel book **Pages & Co** will be published in October 2017 by HarperCollins.

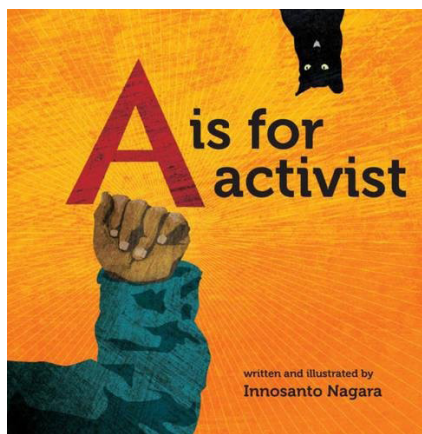
Ten of the Best to Introduce Children to Politics

You may not have noticed, but there's an election coming up. With talk of right, left, and the squeezed middle, which books offer children a strong and stable basis in political thought? **Catherine Barter**, author of the political thriller **Troublemakers**, and bookseller at Housmans, London's oldest radical bookshop, puts an X in the box for the best.

A is for Activist

Innosanto Nagara, Seven Stories Press, 978-1-6098-0539-5, £6.99

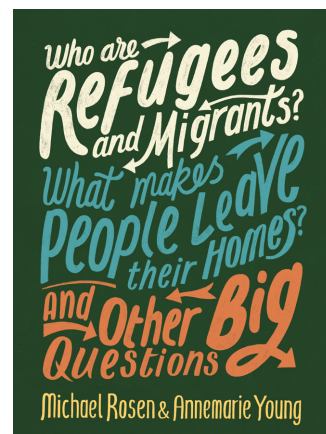
A beautifully illustrated A-Z picture book in which C is for Co-op, F is for Feminism, G is for Grassroots... you get the idea. **A is for Activist** is a playful introduction to politics and people power, packed with ideas for changing the world. It's full of big concepts presented with humour and warmth, and provides plenty of inspiration for budding activists everywhere. Nagara's **Counting on Community** is fantastic, too.



Who are Refugees and Migrants? What Makes People Leave Their Homes? And Other Big Questions

Michael Rosen and Annemarie Young, Wayland, 978-0-7502-9985-5, £13.99

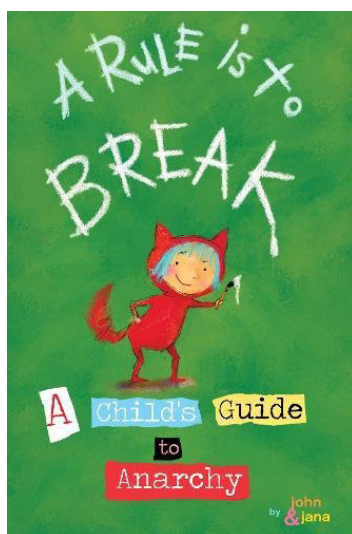
There have been a number of excellent picture books exploring the experience of refugees and migrants recently, like Kate Milner's **My Name is Not Refugee** or Francesca Sanna's **The Journey**. But this non-fiction book for older readers is an excellent primer for this most timely of subjects, offering not just the usual call for tolerance and compassion, but active invitations for children to think critically about the ways in which migration is discussed politically. The inclusion of real migration stories from high-profile people like Rita Ora, Mo Farah, and Michael Rosen himself, give warmth and dimension to this complex topic.



A Rule is to Break: A Child's Guide to Anarchy

John Seven and Jana Christy, Manic D Press, 978-1933149257, £13.99

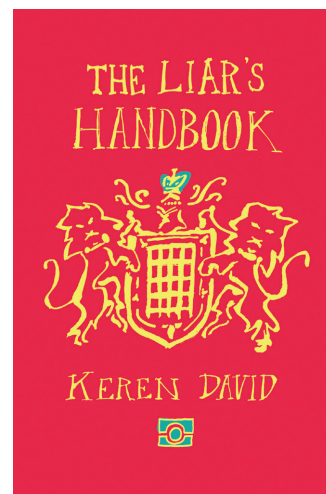
Anarchy might sound scary, but as a political system based on challenging authority and resisting arbitrary rules, it's sure to have some appeal for children. Through the character of Wild Child, this fun picture book introduces some of anarchism's bravest ideas: 'think for yourself', 'build it don't buy it', 'listen to the smallest voice', 'give away stuff for free'. While parents might balk at some of the suggestions (cake for dinner? no baths ever again?), these bold challenges to conventional thinking offer a joyful and yes, anarchic, complement to some of the more worthy and serious political children's books out there..



The Liar's Handbook

Keren David, Barrington Stoke, 978-1-7811-2680-6, £6.99 pbk

Part of Barrington Stoke's **Super Readable** series, this short, punchy novel about families, secrets and lies has a straight-from-the-headlines twist. River, whose mother is a lifelong political activist, is a fifteen-year-old boy with a gift for fabrication. He is suspicious of his mother's new partner, and also has questions about his father, who mysteriously left before River was born. **The Liar's Handbook** takes the recent scandals around undercover policing in activist communities and turns them in to a page-turning family drama. There's no heavy-handed message, here: the ethical questions the book raises are implicit. But Keren David's afterword about the true stories that inspired the book will likely leave curious readers wanting to know more about this very contemporary issue.

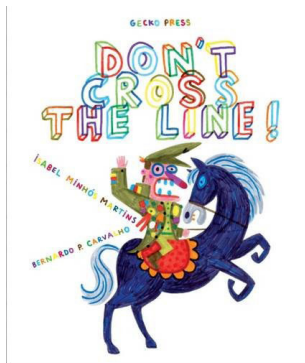


10

Don't Cross the Line

Isabel Minhos Martins, Gecko Press, 978-1776570744, £11.99 hbk

An armed soldier, surrounded by white space, guards the line that divides the pages of the book. Characters amass on the left-hand pages: the soldier will not let them cross the line, citing the orders of The General. When two boys accidentally kick a ball across the page, they cross to retrieve it, and others follow in their wake, until the right-hand page is full of people, and the authority of The General has collapsed. This simple story elegantly introduces concepts of power and peaceful rebellion. The vivid colours and detailed illustrations in this book are gorgeous, and the use of the book's physical format is witty and inventive. We absolutely love this book at Housmans Bookshop.



Liberty's Fire

Lydia Syson, Hot Key Books, 978-1-4714-0367-5, £7.99pbk

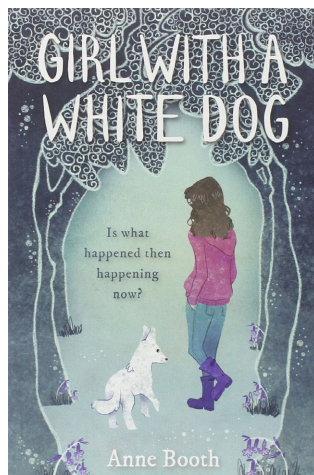
Historical fiction can provide an exciting introduction to political ideas, and in Lydia Syson's YA novel, set during the Paris Commune of 1871, history is much more than a backdrop. An exploration of the socialist ideals and politics of the Commune is woven into the narrative, with characters both inspired and frustrated by the politics of their time. Syson deftly portrays politics as part of the drama and fabric of everyday life—an idea with plenty of resonance today.



Girl with a White Dog

Anne Booth, Catnip Publishing Ltd. 978-1-4714-0367-5, £6.99 pbk

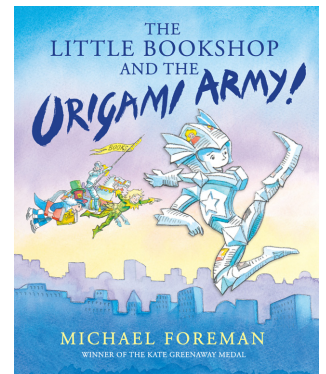
Jessie is learning at school about the rise of fascism in 1930s Germany. Meanwhile, her grandmother is behaving erratically, clearly haunted by something from her past. There are a plenty of children's books dealing with Nazi Germany, but this story is particularly effective in linking the past and the present, and demonstrating that the horrors of fascism can't always be safely confined to history. This was shortlisted for the **Little Rebels Award** in 2015.



The Little Bookshop and the Origami Army

Michael Foreman, Andersen Press, 978-1-7834-4208-9, £6.99 pbk

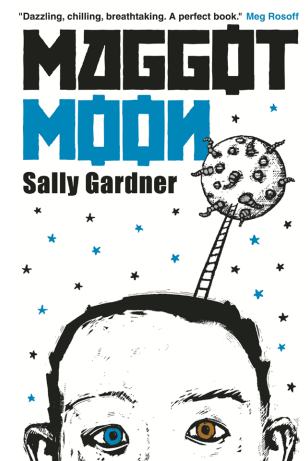
Another **Little Rebels Award** shortlistee. The Mayor decides to close down Joey's favourite bookshop and replace it with a superstore: Origami Girl to the rescue. This picture book might not inspire confidence in government—when Origami Girl heads to Parliament for help, she finds them all literally asleep on the job—but it's a sparky celebration of community action and standing up to power, the type of politics that everybody can be part of.



Maggot Moon

Sally Gardner, Hot Key Books, 978-1471400445, £6.99 pbk

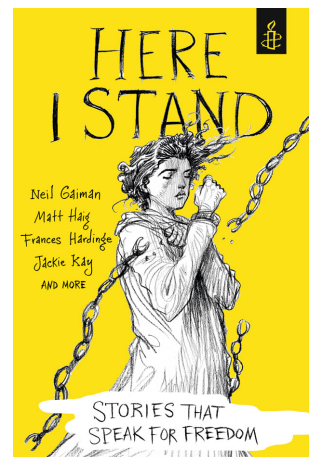
At least one piece of dystopic fiction has to make it on to this list, and the 2013 **Carnegie Medal** winner is still one of my favourites. In a bleak alternate England in which an oppressive and violent regime routinely makes people disappear, the original, defiantly imaginative voice of fifteen-year-old Standish Treadwell offers a reminder that resistance to totalitarianism begins in the mind.



Here I Stand: Stories that Speak for Freedom

Amnesty International UK, Walker Books, 978-1406373646, £7.99 pbk

With contributors including John Boyne, Neil Gaiman, Frances Hardinge, Chelsea Manning and Sabrina Mahfouz, this collection of stories exploring human rights and their various violations could be terribly worthy, but in fact it's a moving, creative response to many of the humanitarian injustices of our time, made more effective by the variety of voices it contains.



Catherine Barter, is author of the political thriller **Troublemakers**, and bookseller at Housmans, London's oldest radical bookshop

Rewarding Reads:

Jake Hope celebrates the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals



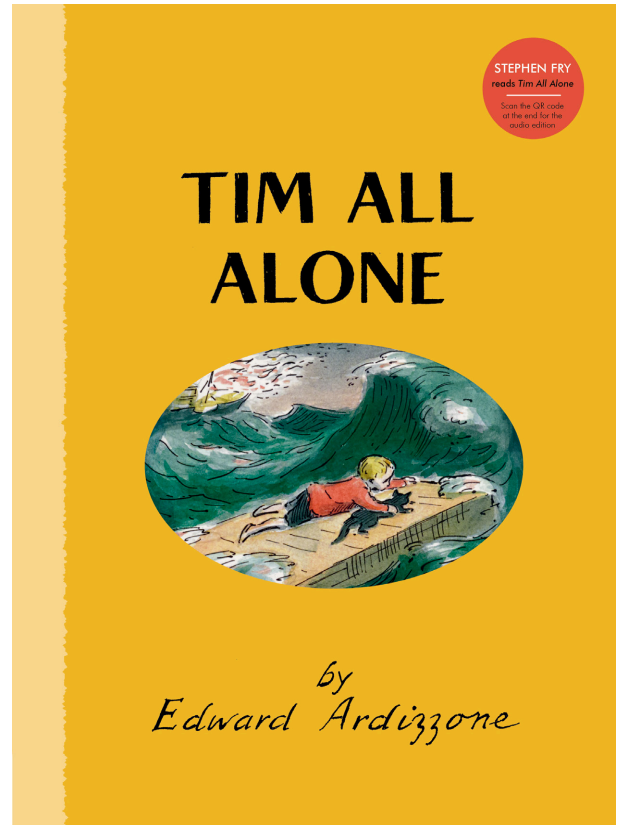
Book awards for children act as a barometer for the shifting traditions, values and ideas that we as individuals and as a society invest in the early stages of our development. **The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professional's Carnegie and Kate Greenaway medals** are the longest running awards in the United Kingdom and among the most prestigious. Celebrating their 80th and 60th anniversaries respectively, the prizes recognise a rich reader experience built from the words or pictures of a work published for children. The wide-ranging base of subjects, genres, themes and styles among its past winners provides material for exploring perspectives on childhood and the formative role that stories and books have in forging our identity and, by extension, of shaping society.

Setting the Standard

Arthur Ransome was the inaugural winner of the **Carnegie Medal** (1936), awarded to a work of outstanding literature for children. **Pigeon Post** is a real romp of a children's adventure novel with a summer holiday search for treasure among a close-knit group of friends. Underlying the plot are ideas around communication and independence and playful consideration of the different worlds that children and adults sometimes inhabit. This innocent childhood world is replicated to some extent in Edward Ardizzone's **Tim All Alone**, the inaugural winner of the **Kate Greenaway Award** for distinguished illustration. The eponymous Tim returns home to find his parents have disappeared, and so sets out on a nautical adventure to find them, his adventure vividly depicted through the draughtsmanship of Ardizzone's pen and ink sketches and water colour spreads.

Innocence Lost

Both books explore a construction of childhood where play and exploration form crucial parts of character experiences and ones where those themes embrace readers through vicarious involvement. Not all winners have shown childhood through such rosy eyes, however. Robert Westall's **The Scarecrows** was his second win



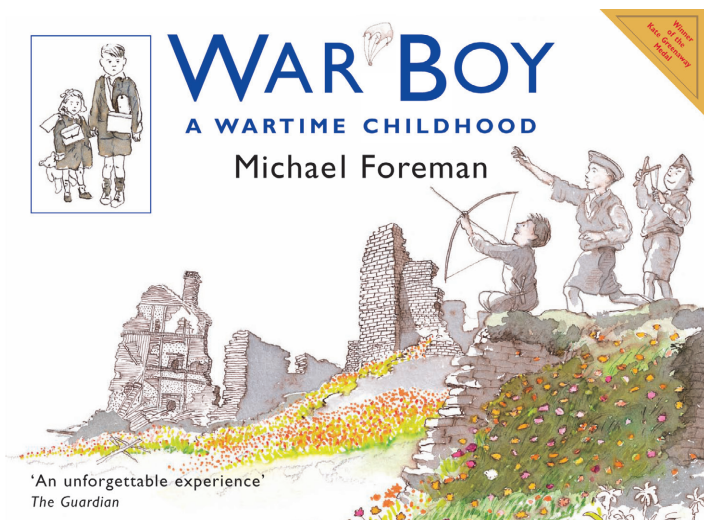
(1981), after **The Machine Gunners** (1975). His work disrupted the notion of childhood as a time of innocence and uncovered a much darker side to play and preoccupation. **The Scarecrows** itself is a stark account of frustrated needs, desires and the awakening of sexual desire. More recently Kevin Brooks' **The Bunker Diary** (2014), looked at ideas of control and powerlessness and caused debate around just what constitutes a children's book and whether hope is a key element in this.

Judging Juries

It is the professional expertise of librarians that forms the base of decisions made by the panel of judges. Each judge is a librarian representing each regional branch of the **Youth Libraries Group**. It is their critical discernment, based around the breadth of their reading and encompassing knowledge of trends in publishing and prevalent attitudes surrounding childhood, that has fuelled their decisions over the decades. The awards have sometimes been criticised for not involving the target audience of children in the actual judging itself.

Casting Long Shadows

Although not involved in judging, children and young people across the United Kingdom and further afield do take part in shadowing. Established in the early 1990s the Shadowing Scheme sees groups involved in reading and appraising the shortlists of the medals. More groups currently shadow the **Carnegie Medal** than the **Kate**



Greenaway Medal, although a project funded by the **Siobhan Dowd Trust** is this year exploring the efficacy of using illustrated books from the **Kate Greenaway Medal** as a means to promote reading and confidence among harder to reach groups. A powerful element of shadowing is the way it doesn't regard literature as a standalone subject, but explores its inter-connections and relevance to all areas of life and learning – arts, communication, sciences, philosophy and psychology, it weaves individual subject strands into a dense tapestry. **Amnesty International** - who have partnered with the awards to give Honours to books that promote Human Rights issues - explore ethical considerations and there are ample craft and arts based materials in the support material available to shadowing groups. In the anniversary year, shadowing groups are also able to select one of the past winners to adopt and read, choosing from a myriad of authors and subjects.

Wide-ranging Winners

Critics of the award have sometimes suggested that the same types of books win though this can be dispelled by the variety of winners. The awards have been won by information books like Edward Osmond's Carnegie winner, **A Valley Grows Up** (1953), which charts the development of a valley and its growth into a flourishing settlement through the ages, or Pauline Baynes's Kate Greenaway winner, **A Dictionary of Chivalry** (1968). Poetry has won both awards with Sarah Crossan's verse novel, **One** (2016), being the most recent Carnegie winner and Charles Keeping's illustrations to Alfred Noye's poems **The Highwayman** (1981). Biography has fared well with Eleanor Doorly's **Radium Woman** winning the Carnegie (1939) for its account of Marie Curie's life, and Michael Foreman's **War Boy: A Country Childhood** (1989), winning the Kate Greenaway for its highly evocative recreation of war time Britain.

Firm Favourites

During the 70th and 50th anniversaries of the awards in 2007, a poll was held to find the **Carnegie of Carnegies** and **Greenaway of Greenaways**. These were won by Philip Pullman with **Northern Lights** (1995 **Carnegie** winner), the first instalment of the seminal **His Dark Materials** trilogy and by Shirley Hughes with **Dogger** (1977 **Kate Greenaway** winner), a story about losing a much loved toy. Author Patrick Ness and illustrator Jim Kay hold the unique honour of being the first and only pairing to win both the **Carnegie** and the **Kate Greenaway** medal with the same book. That was **A Monster Calls** (2012), which was based around an idea by Siobhan Dowd, winner of the **Carnegie Medal** herself with **Bog Child** (2009), an exploration of the history and divisions of Ireland.

With around 15,000 books published annually the **Carnegie** and **Kate Greenaway Medals**, their longlists, shortlists and eventual winners provide an excellent means for navigating through what can sometimes feel an overwhelming array of new publications. The list of winners offer stunning vantage over development of the field that spans decades. Why not delve into their riches yourself?

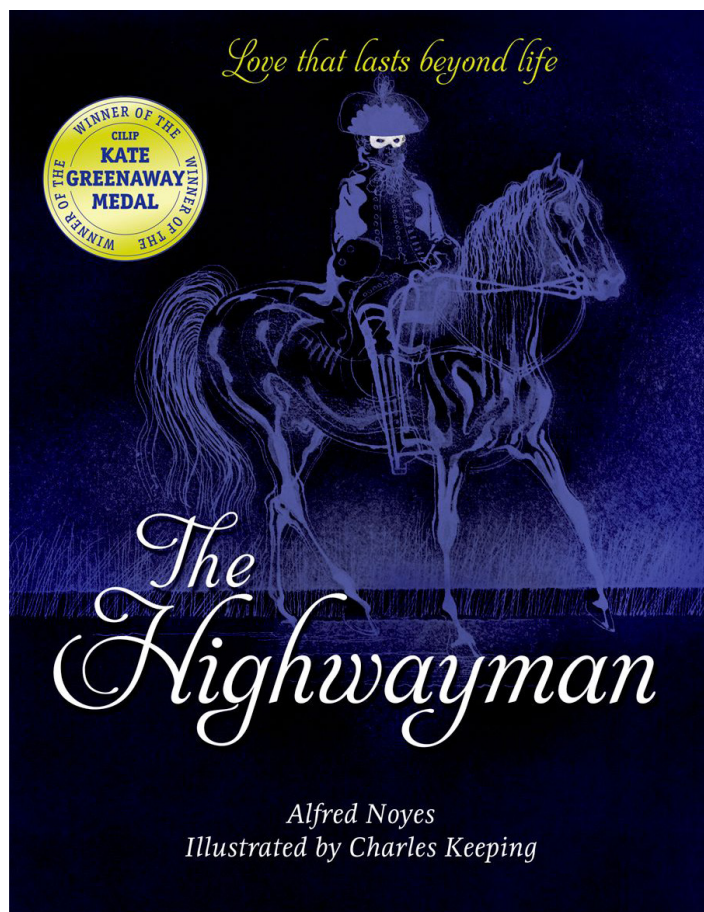
Anniversary Activities

Don't miss out on a range of special activity taking place in this celebratory year. Why not mine the rich treasures trove of the two awards by exploring the living archive <http://www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/archive.php>

CILIP have commissioned a number of thought pieces by key people in the children's book world, these offer a fascinating and thematic place to learn more about the awards and their history. <http://www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/thought-pieces.php>

A special anniversary blog is being created to explore every past Carnegie winner, shadowing groups are also able to adopt past winners. <http://www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/anniversary-blog.php>

Twice winner of the Carnegie Medal Anne Fine is celebrating the awards with a monthly breakdown of past winners by decade over on her Children's Laureate www.myhomelibrary.org site



The #YATakeover are planning a special themed anniversary Twitter discussion leading up to this year's announcement, check out the hashtag to find out more information as the exciting programme is announced.

This year's winners will be announced on 19 June, keep an eye out on the official website www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk to watch the live screening and to organise your own anniversary party using the exciting resources and support materials.

Books mentioned

Pigeon Post, Arthur Ransome, Vintage Classics, 978-0099582540 £7.99

Tim All Alone, Edward Ardizzone, Frances Lincoln, 978-1-8478-0628-4, £12.99 hbk

The Scarecrows, Robert Westall, Macmillan Children's Books, 978-1-9095-3160-4, £7.99 pbk

The Bunker Diary, Kevin Brooks, Penguin, 978-0141326122, £7.99 pbk

One, Sarah Crossan, Bloomsbury, 978-1-4088-2721-5, £7.99

The Highwayman, Alfred Noyes illus Charles Keeping, Oxford, 978-0-1927-9442-0, £7.99

Radium Woman, Eleanor Doorly, O/P

War Boy: A Country Childhood, Michael Foreman, Pavilion Children's Books, 978-1-8436-5087-4, £9.99

Northern Lights, Philip Pullman, Scholastic, 978-1-4071-3022-4, £7.99pbk

Dogger, Shirley Hughes, Red Fox, 978-1-8623-0805-3, £6.99 pbk



Jake Hope is a **Reading Development and Children's Book Consultant**. He has worked as the **Reading and Learning Development Manager** for Lancashire Libraries. Jake is an active member of the **Youth Libraries Group** both on the North West and National Committees. He is currently reading all of the past Carnegie winners and blogging about these.

Magic, mother-daughter bonds, and feeling ‘outsiderish’

Michelle Pauli talks to Irena Brignull about **The Hawkweed Prophecy**.

YA fantasy novel **The Hawkweed Prophecy** and its sequel, **The Hawkweed Legacy**, are pacey reads. There’s a sense of urgency in this bewitching tale of two teenage girls who were swapped at birth. The flow of the books offers a clue, perhaps, to their author’s ‘other life’: **The Hawkweed Prophecy** is a book that might have been a movie (and yet might). Irena Brignull is a successful screenwriter, with her most recent credits including the Oscar-nominated **Box Trolls** and **The Little Prince**. With an impressive track record in such a competitive field of writing, what led her to switch genres?

‘I love film, but it’s a really collaborative process, particularly animation, and while there are great sides to that, it also involves having to compromise and let go of things that you felt strongly about,’ says Brignull. ‘Yes, with a book you have an editor and editing work to do at the end but that’s nothing compared to the years you spend on movies changing things according to different people’s ideas. I saw the book as my way of writing something in the way that I really wanted.’



And what she really wanted was to explore identity and friendship through the lives of confused, spiky Poppy, a witch by birth who grows up in the ‘normal’ world unaware of her magical powers, and sweet, naive Ember, the only non-magical witch in the coven. The everyday world and the magical exist side by side, with only one aware of the other. The witches know from the lessons of history to keep their all-female society secret and to exact severe punishment on any sisters who are tempted by the world of non-magical ‘chaffs’. But the lines between the worlds become blurred when an ancient prophecy about who will become the next witch queen is twisted. When Poppy and Ember meet in the dell, a tiny valley that acts as a transitional place between the edge of the town and the edge of the forest where the coven dwells, and become friends, the boundaries are pushed to their limits.

To her surprise, Brignull found writing a book to be something of an ‘endurance test’ compared to a screenplay. Dialogue-heavy scripts can be relatively quick to write, once the structure is in place, but in novel-writing she discovered the pure pleasure of playing with words, description and character in a way that’s impossible in stories designed for visual consumption.

‘It’s such a discipline in a screenplay, particularly when you’re adapting a book and so much of it is going on in the character’s head, to be able to show everything in a character’s action and reaction rather than letting it just come across naturally, “this is what they’re thinking, this is what they’re feeling”,’ she comments.

However, one imperative of screenwriting is clear throughout both books: the need for constant tension building – as Brignull describes it, ‘the sense of a drama, of building towards a certain course of elements that you either look forward to happening or fear is going to happen’.

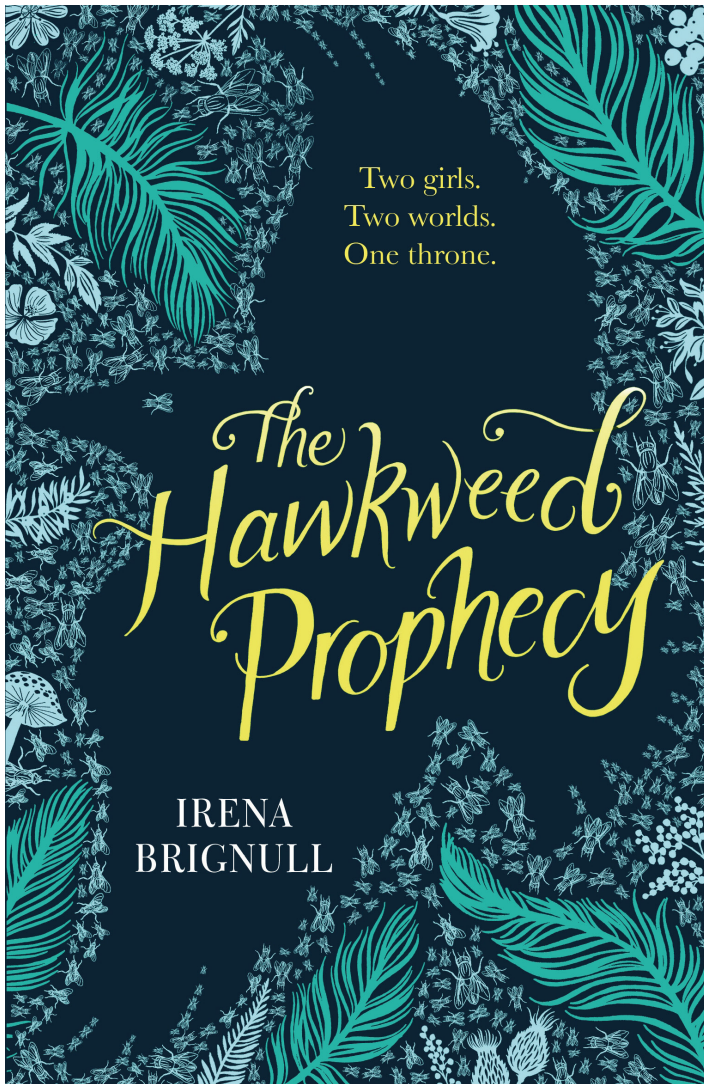
The Hawkweed Prophecy itself was born out of a real life drama. The youngest of Brignull’s three children was just four years old when he was hospitalised for a month, critically ill with asthma. Coming out the other side of the emergency, Brignull needed space to recover and took some time out from screenwriting to fulfil a lifelong ambition of writing a novel.

Both books are very powerful on the parent-child relationship, the pain and pride and power of motherhood. Mother-daughter bonds run through the story, stemming from the consequences of the ambitious ‘tiger mother’ witch Raven, who swaps her sister’s baby so that her own will fulfil the prophecy and become queen. The primal reactions of the various mothers in the book (in the sequel, there is also a mother/son lost and found plotline) to the loss and regaining of their children is, at times, heartrending.

‘It’s like you’re stripped of a layer’, Brignull recalls. ‘It does give you a different perspective on things. I’m sure that must have carried over into the book and I do think the writing of the novel was probably quite cathartic and an outlet for some of those feelings.’

However, while mother-daughter bonds are a strong theme in the Hawkweed books, it is outsiderishness that Brignull feels is at the heart of the story.

‘The first inkling I had about it was these two girls being babies who were switched at birth. Everything came from that point. I wanted them to be really different, but have this common bond - of feeling like outsiders. It was the starting point for me and I think that’s



because when I was a teen I was torn between wishing I could fit in and not wanting to fit in. Looking back on it, it seems a ridiculous notion but at the time it felt very important.'

Talking to Brignull, it feels impossible that she could ever have felt outsiderish. She's delightful company – charming, articulate and interesting – and seems to have led a brilliantly high achieving path, from a degree in English literature at Oxford, to script executive at the BBC and then head of development at Dogstar Films where she was the script editor on films that included **Shakespeare in Love** and **Captain Corelli's Mandolin**, before turning to writing scripts herself. But as we chat about childhood it becomes clear that growing up with dual nationality was a significant point of difference for her.

'My mum is very Greek, with a really thick accent and, in the 70s when I was growing up, England felt like quite a different place than now. We lived in a small village and she really did stand out from the crowd - sometimes I was mortifyingly embarrassed because she was so loud and exuberant. She's absolutely fabulous but when you are quite a shy girl, being picked up from school by the loudest, most colourful mum is not always what you appreciate...' Brignull laughs. 'I felt that when I went to Greece, I didn't really fit in there either, but equally, when I was in the UK I always felt slightly different.'

Brignull grew up in Buckinghamshire in the Chilton Hills in a house hidden down a mile-long track surrounded by fields. Her English father, an advertising copywriter, "didn't want to have any neighbours" and moved the family from Richmond to this rural idyll. "We really did roam free, in the most idyllic sense, and we had horses and ran around fields and when my mum wanted us back, she'd call across a valley to get us home for tea," recalls Brignull.

She draws on and explores this deeply embedded sense of nature in the books, reflecting it in the witches' relationship with the natural world. The coven live close to the earth, in every sense, in tune with the seasons. Their magic is not of the broomsticks and magic wands variety; it is more subtle and earthy than that, but no less powerful for it. They are wild – not least in the 'yoking time' when they venture into town for one-night stands with unsuspecting chaffs in the hope of pregnancy – and offer a glimpse of a society in which girls and women are not defined by their relationship with fathers, brothers, boyfriends and husbands. Yet, still they must conform to the coven's own laws, and with conformity comes the possibility of rebellion, and of seeking a new way.

'I love the idea that you can always find your people, however quirky or however outside the pack you might feel,' Brignull concludes. "You can create your clan that's not always necessarily the family that you come from or what people think or expect of you. Life is about forming those attachments and both books really are about learning to be there for other people.'

The Hawkweed Prophecy and **The Hawkweed Legacy** are published by Orchard Books in paperback at £7.99 each.



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

The Mizielińskis under the microscope

Non-fiction for children has undergone a transformation in recent years with big, bold illustrated books catching the eye and filling bookshelves. Polish illustrators Aleksandra and Daniel Mizieliński can claim a large part in this, their book **Maps**, an international bestseller, led the way in this new approach to information books. In London recently they talked to **Books for Keeps** about their work and new book **Under Earth, Under Water**.

Now husband and wife, Aleksandra and Daniel Mizieliński have been working together since they met at the Faculty of Graphic Arts at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. They studied under the same tutor Professor Maciej Buszewicz and from early days considered writing for children. Daniel explains: 'Some writers feel that writing for children is somehow a lesser occupation, but in design it is the opposite: every famous Polish designer creates books for children, it's like the best thing you can do. It was obvious to us from the start to try our hand at books.'

They developed four or five non-fiction books, created mock ups and took them to publishers: 'Everyone said "Oh those books are great but no-one will buy them",' remembers Daniel ruefully. Then Polish publisher Dwie Siostry asked them to create a book about architecture – H.O.U.S.E. an illustrated guide to the world's most astounding homes, and the architects that designed them. Teeming with colour and information, the book was declared Book of the Year 2008 of the Polish Section of IBBY and later published in English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Russian and many other languages including Arabic and Chinese. Suddenly they were a different proposition for publishers: 'Our approach isn't new,' says

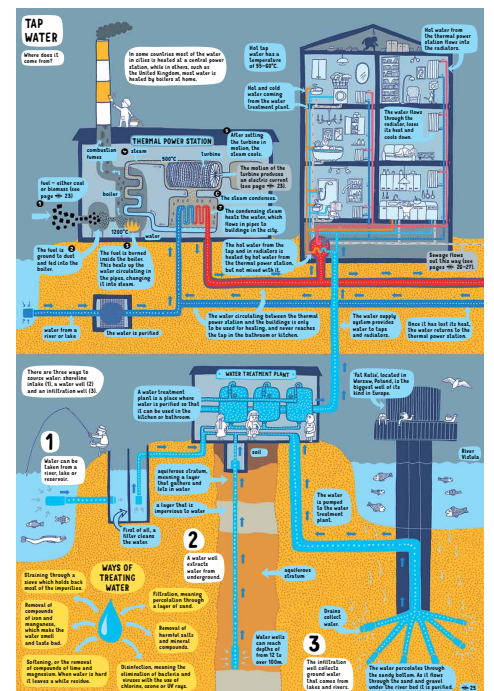
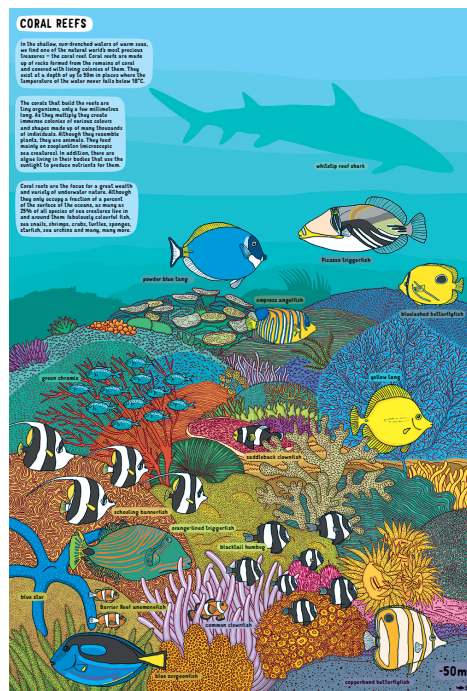
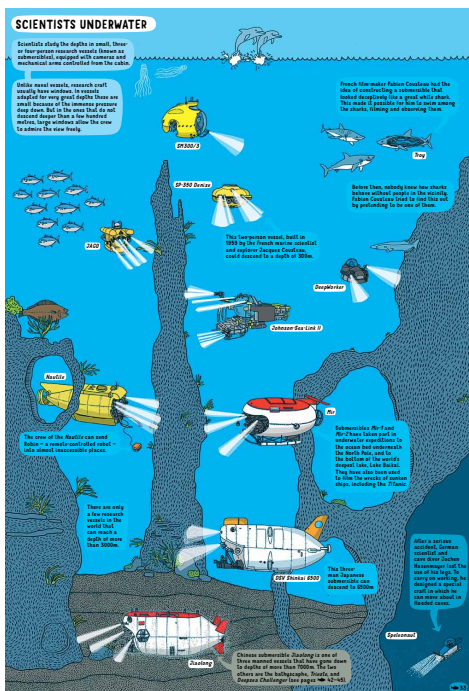


Daniel, 'In fact it's an old idea, but there weren't any artists doing what we did at the time.'

He explains too that the state of the Polish publishing industry at that time was particularly helpful to them: 'When we were kids' (he and Aleksandra were born in 1982) 'Polish publishers were printing at least 2 - 5 million copies of each book; we didn't have a lot of choice but the standard was very high and we all read the same books, knew the same illustrators. The publishing houses were huge and protected. Then came the 90s and capitalism. The old publishers couldn't cope with the free market and collapsed. After ten years of very unimaginative publishing, people were asking for something more and by the early 2000s lots of small publishers were being created. We were lucky enough to graduate at a time when those publishers were beginning to have some success, and were in a position to try new things.'

'we want to do the opposite of google'

They both write and draw, generally taking a chapter each, though in **Maps**, because of the huge amount of detail to each page, they worked on the spreads together. Their research involves working with many different specialists – **Under Earth, Under Water** for



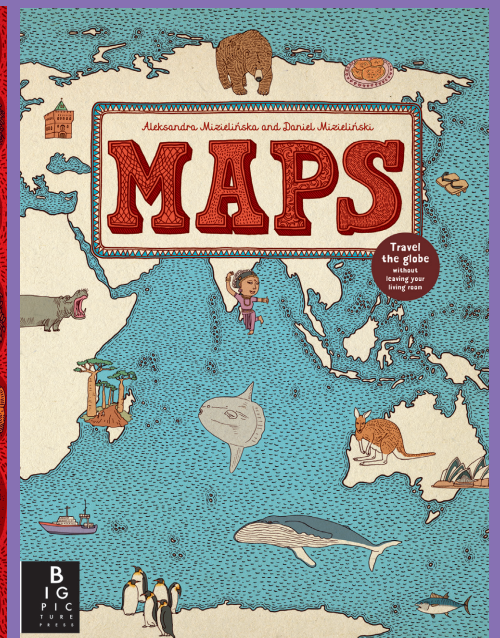
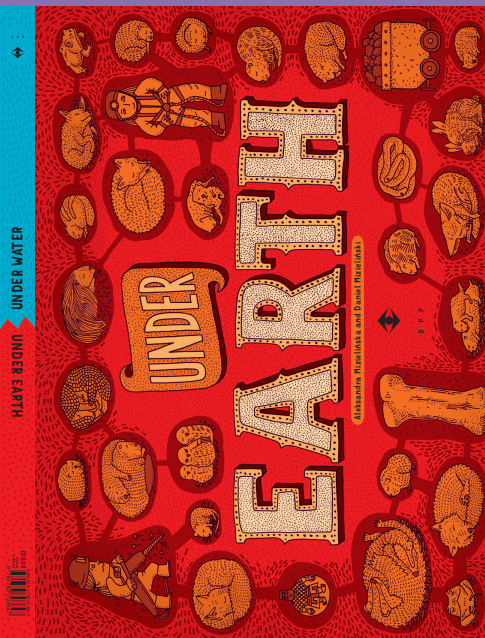


example features everything from early submarines to deep-sea life, to sewage purification: 'We're not the experts and that's why the books are so successful: we are working on subjects that are interesting to us and are excited about things that are maybe not so exciting to people who have studied the subjects for years. We don't expect readers to remember everything that we put in the books – education now shouldn't be based on remembering things because all of us have phones and can google everything any time; we want to do the opposite of googling, not kill curiosity or throw a lots of random information at readers but try to show how things work, concrete for example, which is used everywhere, is super-interesting and by conveying that maybe we will create future engineers, architects and builders.'

'We don't like to think of ourselves as illustrators or that we have a particular style, though of course we do. Instead we always think about how things should look starting with the content – eg with **Maps** we knew that we wanted 100 images per map, so they'd have to be quite small, the lines would have to be quite thin and the book itself would have to be quite big. We knew we couldn't use paint because it would be unreadable. The form should always be the vehicle for the content'.

'One of the most important things we learned while studying is that the worst thing an illustrator can do is to read the text and then draw the things that are in the text because those two languages are different teachers: if I want to say "I love you" it would be very hard to do it using images, and even if you try you will probably create some new kind of coded alphabet - like emoji for example. But by using images I can describe how things work or what they look like very, very quickly; if we can describe something through an image – this is the most important thing a picture book can do.'

Maps and **Under Earth, Under Water** are published by Big Picture Press, hardback, £20 each



Travel the world with the Mzielińskis' best-selling **MAPS** and explore beneath the surface with the incredible **Under Earth, Under Water**

Packed with amazing facts and filled with stunning illustrations these are books to pore over and treasure.



Two Children Tell: Nicholas and Grendel

In the latest of her series describing children's early responses to stories and language, **Virginia Lowe** recalls her son Nicholas's first encounters with Beowulf.

N: I like the monsters – pretend monsters in books. I am crazy, aren't I?

V: Why are you crazy?

N: Cos I like monsters. I'm not scared of them if they haven't got anything dangerous like guns and spears and bows and arrows and swords!

This was a very mature reaction to the scary, both acknowledging it and saying openly that he enjoyed it. Nick was almost four (3y11m).

It was his first look through White/Provensen's **Myths and Legends**. A friend had given Rebecca a Ladybird book of myths, containing the stories of the Minotaur and the Gorgon. Rebecca had never shown any interest, but Nick had recently devoured them, so I tried the library for something more aesthetic.

When he was younger, Nick had avoided scary things completely, leaving the room as the story was read or the Count was on Sesame Street, or running from the theatre when mock violence erupted.

Harry the Dirty Dog was scary, because it was easy to imagine getting dirty, but then not being recognised by your family! This was fearful in a way Sendak's benign Wild Things were not. There was an intermediate stage, where he gave cuddles to the reader or to the scary creature, often accompanied by 'He yoves me, that yion!'

This afternoon, he was fascinated by my abbreviated telling from the pictures of Beowulf, Grendel, and especially Grendel's mother. He had had a particularly disruptive week with many tellings-off, and I surmised that a monster-mother was easy to identify with. Later, as he retold the story to John after work, he used 'kid' and began 'the little one' but changed it to 'not the mother one', so he seemed to be identifying.

We collected Rebecca from school, then I read the **Beowulf** story to both. Despite his stated liking of monsters Nick held tightly to my thumb, and sat on my lap at particularly tense moments. He felt anxiety, but talked big about his enjoyment.

This was followed by a painting session, and Rebecca started making a horse mask out of two paper supermarket bags. Nick was keen to act out the story.

N: I'm pretending I'm a monster, Becca. I've got a good idea. I can be the monster that was in the book we read, and you can be the person that kills him! I could be Grendel and Becca could be the person.

R: But I'm being a horse!

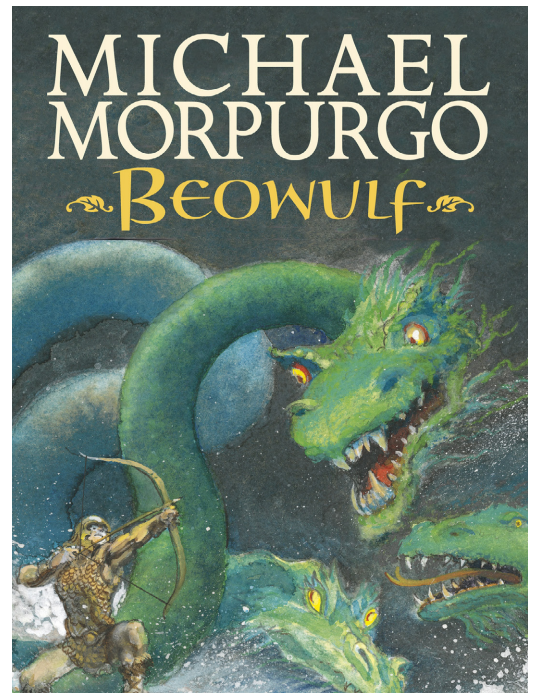
N: Well they said they're riding on horses when they were after the mother, so I could be the mother.

This is the only time he offered to act a female. Two months later he was fascinated with the Groke from Jansson's **Moomintroll** series, saying: 'We've never seen one and there's nothing real about them' but never acted this female villain.

Next day was a Saturday. After we all four had had a cuddle in the big bed, I asked Nick if he was still Grendel. He said he was and crawled under the bed. John was Beowulf, and started spouting mock alliterative Anglo-Saxon poetry.

Nick was loath to come out, having scared himself. He knew that Beowulf must kill him. For quite a while he contented himself with throwing out shoes and other objects from under the bed.

Some snatches of dialogue. When John had trouble following his convoluted plot, Nick called him names –



N: Well I have to come out and you have to kill me, Silly.

N: Just pretend to kill me.

J: A sock was slung suddenly. Grendel gasped and great was the pain.

When John briefly left the room

N: I'm getting tired of this

V: Why don't you attack someone who isn't Beowulf? (So you wouldn't have to be killed, I meant)

N: Cos I got to do something that I can't really do, and that's eating people!

N: I need to go to the toilet, and how can I with Beowulf there? (John was back).

J: (obligingly): I'm looking out the window.

So Nick took a break to the toilet. On return, J lay down beside the bed

J: Beowulf sank down into the swamp

N: Not yet, Silly dum dum. We're up to a different part. Cos I'm only doing the fighting bits.

Here it become really wild, and Rebecca joined in. But he insisted:

N: We're still playing it, and this is the bit where you've got a gun.

By 4y10m he was able to say of a Christmas present, D'Auliers' **Book of Greek Myths**

N: The one with all the scary monsters in is my favourite book!

He spoke as one who had come to terms with all the varieties of fear that the literary world so far had presented to him, learned how to handle them, and from those experiences, learned something about coping with the threats which the actual world can present.

Book of Greek Myths Ingri and Edgar D'Aulaire

Moomintroll (series) Tove Jansson,

Famous Legends Book 1 JDM Preshous,

Where the Wild Things Are Maurice Sendak,

Myths and Legends Anne Terry White, illus. by Alice and Martin Provensen

Harry the Dirty Dog Gene Zion, illus. by Margaret Bloy Graham.



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

I wish I'd written...

Jason Wallace declares **Lord of the Flies** by far and away the book he wishes he'd written.



Jason Wallace's new book, **Encounters** (978-1-7834-4528-8) is published by Andersen Press, £9.99 hbk.

I know, it's a cliché. William Golding's classic tale of 'a pack of British boys' marooned on an uninhabited island has sold about a ger-zillion copies since it was first published, and not only is it a book that everyone – and I mean, everyone – has heard of, but they were probably made to study it at some stage because it is pretty much THE set text in schools and universities.

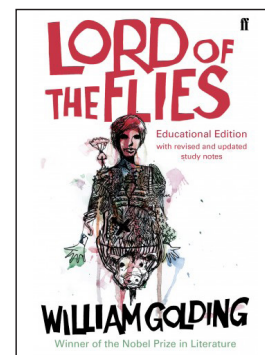
But my wanting to have written it has less to do with copies sold (let's pause to remember that, for the first few years, **Lord of the Flies** didn't do very well) and far more to do with brilliance in understated writing.

Brilliance? No, it's a masterclass. Like Cormack McCarthy's **The Road**, it is simple in appearance, without the fuss and clutter of 'show-ey

off-ey' language. But those who write will know that simplicity is incredibly hard to produce – or, rather, to pull off.

With **Lord of the Flies**, Golding produced an amazingly, deceptively powerful book of deeply powerful emotions – through utterly real characters and scarily accurate scenarios. No fancy words, no dreary scene-setting over pages and pages. Golding delivers stomach punches through single sentences (and he does, over and over), and that, to me, is the true goal of great creativity.

I will never tire of **Lord of the Flies**. The title alone has my heart pounding. Bravo (he says cheerily through gritted teeth).



Lord of the Flies (978-0-5711-9147-5) by William Golding is published by Faber & Faber, £8.99.

Good Reads

Our Good Reads were chosen by young people at the **Hemel Hempstead School**, Hemel Hempstead. Thanks to school librarian **Ellen Krajewski**.

Demon Road

Derek Landy, HarperCollins, 978-0-0081-5692-3, £7.99 pbk

Demon Road is the first book in a trilogy about a girl named Amber who, up until her 17th birthday, has been led to believe, by her parents, that she is a normal kid. However, when her 17th birthday comes around she discovers that her parents and their friends have been hiding a big secret all their lives and that secret is that they are shapeshifting demons, and have been eating each other's (and their own) children in return for immortality.

It has been my favourite book ever since I first read it. Not only has it got all my favourite features, things like violence and mayhem but also love and friendship, it also has a great storyline, great characters and a great premise. I mean, what beats a teenage girl whose parents are trying to eat her in order to stay immortal? As well as all this it's written by one of the most acclaimed authors of today: Derek Landy. Derek Landy is not only known for this trilogy, however, as his first series of books was about the skeleton detective, **Skulduggery Pleasant**. Part fantasy, part horror, part family drama – **Demon Road** is a cracking read!

Billy Reed-Hook, Year 8

The Hunger Games

Suzanne Collins, Scholastic, 978-1-4071-0908-4, £7.99

The **Hunger Games** is about Katniss Everdeen who steps forward to take her sister's place in the Hunger Games, a sinister place where only death awaits, ready to take you to the unknown world. Along with 12 boys and 12 girls they are all trapped in the menacing arena and are forced to kill each other. Katniss must kill to survive otherwise she'll be killed.

What I like about this book is that it engages the reader into wanting to find out more. The blurb catches your attention and the moment you read it, you can't stop. It has a constant suspense all through the book. I've read this book three



Billy Reed-Hook



Aneeqa Khan



Naomi Borden Sanchez



Nicholas Durer



Oliver Durer

time now as I'm so obsessed with it.

It would have been good to know more about Katniss's past and not to go straight to the present. I think it would be better if we saw her childhood in terms of how she was when she was younger and if the society of district 12 was always the same and whether it was always a deprived and a poor district. I would definitely recommend this book.

Aneeqa Khan, Year 7

Noughts and Crosses

Malorie Blackman, Corgi Children's Books, 978-0-5525-5570-8, £7.99 pbk

I love **Noughts and Crosses** because it is so different to any other book I have ever read. I like how Malorie Blackman switched around the empowerment of black people being more powerful than the white. It shows what it would have been like. If you think about it **Noughts and Crosses** is a bit like Shakespeare's **Romeo and Juliet** with the two main characters tangled up in a forbidden love. I think everyone should read this book and, if you enjoy it, read the whole series!

Naomi Borden Sanchez, Year 9

The Smell of Other People's Houses

Bonnie Sue Hitchcock, Faber & Faber, 978-0-5713-1495-9, £7.99 pbk

The book I have chosen is **The Smell of Other People's Houses**. This book has helped me enlighten myself that there are more perspectives to a story than we know or are told. The way the story is told gave me a sense of unity and the way they solved their problems renewed my faith in the humans as a race. Despite the story not being

real it addresses a lot of problems of modern countries which often get overlooked.

Nicholas Durer, Year 8

The Lies We Tell Ourselves

Robin Talley, Mira Ink, 978-1-8484-5292-3, £7.99 pbk

The Lies We Tell Ourselves is quite possibly my favourite Historical Fiction story. Set in America, it follows the story of two young girls, during the end of apartheid. As the high schools in the area are forced to allow black children to attend, Sarah, a black girl, who excelled in her old 'blacks-only' school, is made to take remedial classes and suffer abuse from the other children. She is forced to take part in a group project with Linda, a white girl whose father strongly believes in keeping the 'Negroes' separate from the whites. The girls are forced to confront the truths about their situation, and discover other views, and possibly feelings for each other.

The reason I loved this book so much is the way the author managed to convey their emotions through the alternating points of view, and successfully creates empathy for both characters. Robin Talley made me feel the pain Sarah went through, and feel for the confusion Linda felt in her life. While the book deals with the two touchy subjects of homophobia and racism, the book still felt accessible, although the constant use of the N word for realism sometimes felt a bit excessive.

I would definitely recommend this book, as the story takes you through emotional twists and turns, and appeals to me, despite being out of my ordinary genres.

Oliver Durer, Year 10.

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.

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

Rebecca Butler writes and lectures on children's literature.

Jane Churchill is a children's book consultant.

Katie Clapham runs specialist children's bookshop **Storytellers, Inc.** in Lancaster.

Caroline Downie has been a Children's Librarian for over 20 years, working in a variety of settings.

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

Sean Edwards is Haringey's **Principal Librarian for Children and Youth**.

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.

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

Matthew Martin is a primary school teacher.

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

Margaret Pemberton is a school library consultant and blogs at margaretpemberton.edublogs.org.

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

Sue Roe is a children's librarian.

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

Lynne Taylor is Schools Programme Manager, Paper Nations.

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

Sue Unstead is a writer and publishing consultant

Under 5s Pre – School/Nursery/Infant

Bedtime with Ted

★★★★

Sophy Henn, Bloomsbury, 24pp, 978-1-4088-8079-1, £6.99hbk

Sophy Henn's adorable illustrations find their perfect home in this chunky board book perfect for a tiny tot's bedtime routine. Ted keeps being told it's bedtime, but he's just so busy; having a bath with some splashy penguins, brushing his teeth with a snappy crocodile, slurping his milk with a striped tiger and jumping out his fidgets with a kangaroo. Finally everything is done and Ted is ready for bed. The final fold out shows Ted in bed with all of his cuddly toys – the same animals who were helping him get ready. A vintage palette, sturdy pages with big flaps for little fingers and Sophy's delightful characters make this a pretty perfect little book. Look out for **Playtime with Ted**, and the forthcoming **Dress Up with Ted** and **Time to Go with Ted**. **KC**

Tiger Tiger

★★★★

Jonny Lambert, Little Tiger Press, 978-1-8486-9443-9, £10-99 hbk

Little Tiger Press have chosen an apt and engaging book to celebrate their 30th anniversary. The illustrations are bold and stylish, full of light and colour and jungle happenings, each double page spread bearing repeated scrutiny. The story line spans the generation gap, featuring an old tiger and a young cub. Cub grows bored whilst Tiger snoozes all day: 'Don't sleep all day! Get up! Wake up! I want us to play!' Tiger agrees to a slow walk through the jungle, where humming birds *Dart! Dash! Rush!*, Tiger wanting nothing but home and a long nap. *Flit! Float! Flutter!* Cub is fascinated by a butterfly, then *Chit-chat! Yatter!*, monkeys swinging to and fro. Cub catches their energy and sense of fun. Tiger just about remembers the monkeys' antics. But as Cub discovers more and more excitement in the jungle, old Tiger gradually warms to the thrill of the fauna around them, eventually joining Cub in tree climbing and announcing it was fun. By the end of the book, the old and young are united in the excitement of their jungle frolic, and have a friendship we feel will endure. A good book to share within the family. **GB**

Hug Me, Please!

★★★

Przemyslaw Wechterowicz. illus Emilia Dziubak, Words & Pictures, 32pp, 978-1-7849-3775-1, £11.99 hbk

This award-winning Polish picture book combines stunning illustrations with the simple story of Daddy Bear and Little Bear who spend a happy day walking through the forest dispensing hugs to all the creatures

they meet. The startled recipients include Mr Beaver, Miss Weasel, the Big Bad Wolf, Ms Anaconda and even a hunter. The two bears finally realise that the only creatures left un-hugged are themselves.

This is a slight, feel-good story, although not all of the animals look as though they want to be hugged by a bear, and the beautiful, detailed and expressive illustrations compensate for the lack of plot. The intricate forest setting effectively fills the double page spreads, the characters' eyes and body language are very expressive and the inventive ways in which the differing sizes of the characters are presented adds to the humour. The opening illustration of the sun brushing its teeth is both a delight and a fitting beginning to this eye-catching translated picture book. **SR**

There's a Walrus in My Bed!

★★★★

Ciara Flood, Andersen Press, 32pp, 978-1-7834-4492-2, £11-99 hbk

With an intriguing cover illustration showing a small boy in pjs, along with a bulgy balloon-type being, this story starts with the delivery of a new bed for the boy Flynn, by Wally and Russ Beds. Come bedtime, Flynn goes to tell his parents that there is a walrus in his bed, which, of course, they do not believe. Flynn tries to squeeze into the bed, but the walrus is either hungry, catching a cold, thirsty... or just plain has an unreachable itch? Flynn does all he can think of to relieve walrus's problems preventing them going to sleep. The single response he gets from the beast is 'HARRUMPH!' whilst his parents go along with his story with disbelief. The illustrations show how much discomfort all four characters suffer, in a muted colour palette, on thick paper. Flynn thinks he has cracked the going to sleep problem when he decides what walrus needs is a cuddle! The surprising resolution shows walrus tucked up in mum and dad's bed, with the parents horrified by the vision of a walrus overflowing in their own bed. The first end paper shows Wally and Russ delivering the child's new bed, and the last.... Whaley Big Baths are delivering a new bath, their van logo showing ... Lots of room for imaginative talk about this story line, familiar in homes all around the world! **GB**

Sunk

★★★★★

Rob Biddulph, HarperCollins Children's Books, 978-0-0082-0739-7, £12.99 hbk

Penguin Blue, star of **Blown Away**, is back. He and his friends are pirates, sailing across the seas in search of treasure. But what happens when they are shipwrecked? Will Penguin Blue be able to come to the rescue

with a cunning plan? Using a simple rhyming text Biddulph captures the fun of playing at pirates – yes, it is a game – the final spread confirms this when we see the pirate ship transformed into an Adventure Playground. What fun. The theme of cooperation and friendship is entirely appropriate and neatly played out. Biddulph's illustrations are, as always, beautifully designed. His bold, uncluttered images and clear, saturated colours demand the attention of the young audience at whom this is aimed. The cover is an invitation in itself. Penguin Blue and his quirky adventures are fast becoming a staple at Storytime. We must hope he has plenty more. **FH**

My Tail's Not Tired!

★★★★★

Jana Novotny Hunter, illus. Paula Bowles, Child's Play, 32pp, 978-1-846-3986-5, £5.99 pbk

Little Monster's tail certainly isn't tired, and neither is the rest of him! Over and over again, Big Monster (could be either mum or dad) patiently watches the antics of an excited toddler who *really* doesn't want to go to bed. Firstly, there are his knees: 'My knees have lots of bounces in them.' 'Show me,' says Big Monster. And he does. Then his bottom wants to 'wiggle-jiggle', his tail wants to swing, his back wants to roly poly and most of the rest of his body gets into the act. Patient Big Monster tiredly continues to say 'Show me' until the inevitable happens and Little Monster falls asleep in mid-action. The lovely, crayon-y, child-like drawings are a treat, and show perfectly the lovable antics of the toddler and the loving acceptance of the parent. Somehow, in the midst of all this chaos, the bedtime routine manages to get done. The youngest children will enjoy the repetition and fun and may try out this technique when told that bedtime is near! A really super picture book which could result in parents saying, 'Show me' a lot! **ES**

Quiet!

★★★★★

Kate Alizadeh, Child's Play, 32pp, 978-1-8464-3888-2, £5.99 pbk

This is a book about noises, ordinary, every-day noises at home. If there is a mum, we don't meet her, but there is a cheerful dad, a baby brother, and a child who could be either male or female; I'm opting for a girl. It is she who notices and identifies all the noises in the house. In the kitchen, there's the click of a toaster, a burbling kettle, a humming fridge, and a ping-pong microwave. At dinner, the baby burps and bangs his spoon, the cat munches, and dad laughs. Through the evening we hear different noises in different rooms, and as it wears on, there are bathroom noises

reviews

Under 5s Pre - School/Nursery/**Infant** contd.

and bedroom noises, the final of which is dad's reading a story and then singing a song in his 'deep quiet voice'. It is a lovely story for any child, but is particularly so for a child with a sight impairment who is even more aware of the noises both small and large around the home and will enjoy a book aimed particularly at her world. Inclusive because all children will enjoy the book and talking about the various home noises, it is also

inclusive because it specifically includes those who see the world in a rather different way. The illustrations are simple, bright and colourful, and the white background will help those with partial sightedness to be able to see them. Altogether, a highly successful, simple story that will appeal to all children learning about their home environment. **ES**

A Perfect Day

★★★★★

Lane Smith, *Two Hoots*, 36pp, 978 1 5098 4055 7, £11.99 hbk

The story, of few words and atmospheric illustrations, begins in the warmth of a tranquil spring garden. The sun shines hazily. A cat dozes in the flower beds, a dog cools in his paddling pool, a bird pecks at seed on the feeder and a helpful boy throws out a corn cob for the visiting squirrel. A perfect day. But not for

long. Enter a bear, striding out of the wide white page margin, stage left. And now, for everyone else, it is a perfect day no longer, as bear guzzles the corn cob, tips the bird seed down his throat, pours the paddling pool water over his head, rolls gloriously in the flower bed and falls contentedly asleep. A perfect day for bear. With great economy and huge enjoyment, Lane Smith conveys both the familiar joys of garden life in the sun and the excitement of its unlooked-for rumbustious disruption. **CB**

5 - 8 Infant/Junior

Ed's Choice

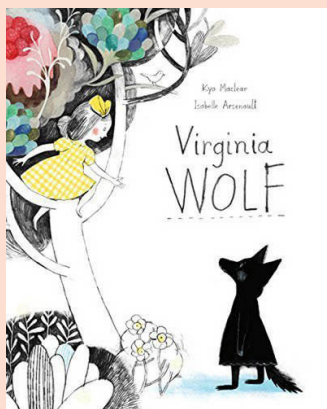
Virginia Wolf

★★★★★

Kyo Maclear, illus. Isabelle Arsenault, Book Island, 978-1-9114-9603-8, £9.99 hbk

'One day my sister Virginia woke up feeling wolfish'. Nothing can change her mood, though sister Vanessa tries and tries. When Virginia finally admits there is something - or rather a somewhere - that will make her feel better, it is up to Vanessa to create it.

This is an outstanding picture book on all levels. While the adults reading it may recognise the literary background, this is not the sum total of the story. It deals with the relationship between two sisters and tackles imaginatively the problem of depression. The author doesn't preach, rather young readers will be able to sympathise and empathise as the characters face a difficult situation. Maclear's text with its puns and direct voice is perfectly complemented by Arsenault's exceptional illustrations that capture



the bleakness of Virginia's state and the desperation of Vanessa until the breakthrough. Then the bare white spreads populated by silhouettes - look at those spiky wolfish ears - become transformed as flowers, birds and animals burst into the pages in lovely lollipop colours. And guess what? Those ears become a beautiful blue bow. This is a book that that should be shared. It has so much to offer. Originally published in Canada, we must rejoice that it has arrived here. **FH**

Little Lemur Laughing

★★★★★

Joshua Seigel, Bloomsbury Education, 96pp, 9781472930064 £5.99pbk

This is a little gem of a poetry book, perfect for any household and school. Joshua Seigel is definitely my new favourite poet. I have some 'go to' books in a poetry collection built up right from when I started teaching so to make it in to here you have to span the poetry gambit of the whole primary age. **Little Lemur Laughing** certainly does this.

The poems are a great mixture with many animal poems, especially of course involving lemurs. The first one what is a poem? is really beautiful and would be a wonderful stimulus for writing with a

class, there is no end to where you could go with that one. However the others are a jam packed variety of shape poems, verse poems, rhyming, not rhyming which would be great to inspire and are fabulous for reading out loud. The play with words continues throughout. The way some of the poems are connected is really clever, for example Fruit Bat and Bat's Fruit. I've already tested them out with KS2 and they loved them. Fruit Bat especially appealed. Poems like these give everybody that extra encouragement to perhaps keep to simply playing with words and enjoy language.

Just a riotous romp of poetry with funny drawings to appeal to independent readers. Definitely one for any collection. **SG LS**

Ballerina Dreams

★★★★★

Michaela and Elaine DePrince, ill. Ella Okstad, Faber & Faber, 64pp, 978-0-5713-2973-1, £6.99pbk

Aimed at newly independent readers, this short, illustrated book tells the inspirational, true story of Michaela DePrince, a war orphan from Sierra Leone whose dreams of becoming a ballerina were realised when she was adopted and taken to a new life in America. There, she worked hard to overcome doubts to become a black ballerina and role model to other young girls.

The short, clear text, pink, sparkly cover and very appealing, lively illustrations by Ella Okstad all combine to give the impression of a traditional beginner reader for ballet loving girls, but this book has a lot more to offer. This is the UK publication of a carefully-adapted younger reader edition of Michaela DePrince's memoir **Hope in a Ballet Shoe**. It is an inspiring autobiography with a story of dreams achieved against all odds. It is co-authored by Michaela's adoptive mother, an inspirational woman in her own right, and a positive message about the power of adoption can be added to such other important themes as having dreams, overcoming obstacles, friendship and the importance of hard work, dedication and encouraging others. This is a beautiful, simple and emotionally powerful story; it packs a big punch for a little book whilst never losing accessibility for its intended age range. Highly recommended. **SR**

When I Coloured in the World

★★★★★

Ahmadreza Ahmadi, illustrated by Ehsan Abdollahi, *Tiny Owl*, 32pp, 978 1 910328 22 4, £7.99pbk

This colourful picture book from Iranian writer Ahmadreza Ahmadi follows a simple concept - a child is given a box of crayons and using each colour they cover something bad in the world and replace it with something beautiful. Darkness becomes light when the yellow crayon makes all the light come on. Hunger

becomes a field of wheat growing from a green crayon. Children might enjoy trying to fill in this template with their own colourful ideas on how to make the world a better place. The illustrations are bold and original and the book would work well in a classroom setting. **KC**

The Covers of my Book are Too Far Apart (and Other Grumbles)

★★★★★

Vivian French, illustrated by Nigel Baines, *Picture Squirrels*, 32pp, 978-1-7811-2602-8, £6.99 pbk

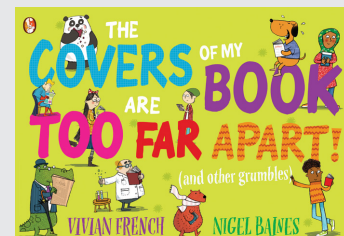
This is an enjoyable picture book about all the excuses made by children - and grown-ups - who aren't convinced they like reading.

On each double-page spread there's a grumble such as "reading is hard" or "I can't find a book I like" or "I don't have time to read", but for each one there are counter-arguments, with advice and recommendations from a fun range of characters. There's a book-eating panda, a pony librarian, twin chimps, and a flying superhero, just to name a few!

The advice is supportive for anyone who perhaps struggles with reading. Reading in all its forms is encouraged - joke books, e-books, comics, audio books, information books - and there are lots of ideas about how to find books that you will enjoy.

Importantly, there's a challenge to publishers to make books showing diverse cultures, family types and people with disabilities, so that readers can recognise themselves in the books they are reading.

It's a dyslexia-friendly text, great for adults to read with children. All



the text is in speech bubbles, and the illustrations are full of humour. There's so much to pore over and talk about that it will be a joy to share. It will help teachers, librarians, and anyone who supports children's reading development to have a good discussion about reading. **LT.**

Rabbit & Bear The Pest in the Nest

★★★★

Julian Gough, illus Jim Field, Hodder Children's Books, 978-1-4449-3426-7, £9.99 hbk.

Rabbit wakes up to bright light and noise. Sunshine fills the den and Bear is snoring loudly. He makes his way to his own burrow, but excitement at the signs of Spring soon gives way to annoyance. His burrow is a mess, Tortoise is too chatty – and then, there's the most terrible banging coming from the tree. Exasperated – and very angry – Rabbit summons trusty Bear to stop the racket. Will Bear please tell that noisy Woodpecker to shut up? Of course, Bear resolves the matter – but not in the way that Rabbit was expecting.

Warmth, tenderness and humour fill every page of this enchanting story. Simply written and utterly engaging, it effortlessly exemplifies the way to wisdom and wellbeing. Slowly and deliberately, Bear shows Rabbit how to approach the world – not from a selfish perspective in which he is at the centre, but as one among many creatures in a breathtakingly beautiful and harmonious world. The illustrations are expressive, establishing the personalities and moods of the forest creatures through facial gestures and posture. Both entertaining and philosophical, there's also a lot to discuss in this gem of a book. **AF**

Edgar and the Sausage Inspector

★★★★

Jan Fearnley, Nosy Crow, 978-0-8576-3822-9, £11.99 hbk

Edgar loves his sister, Edith and tries to make her happy every day. This means searching out the most delicious treats. But who is this Inspector? He has a hat and a badge; he must be important – so when he confiscates the food, Edgar can do nothing. Or can he?

A picture book by Jan Fearnley is always welcome since it will be full of humour balanced by a neat sense of jeopardy. **Edgar and the Sausage Inspector** is no exception. The story follows a traditional pattern of repeated but escalating situations, ensuring the attention of the young reader. Fearnley's illustrations are always noted for her strong lively lines and colourful palette. Here, they make full use of each spread, provide all the clues which are further emphasised by a clever use of vocabulary and

fonts. The text, however, is always clear and uncluttered – a welcome design. It would be great to read aloud and share. Edgar is a cat of character, the rat a proper comedy villain who gets his comeuppance. And there is a neat use of the word 'bad' that references all its meanings, including the most contemporary. A delicious treat. **FH**

Charlie and Mouse

★★★

Laurel Snyder, ill. Emily Hughes, Chronicle Books, 40pp, 978-1-4521-3153-5 £9.98 hbk

Charlie and Mouse are two brothers who have four different little adventures divided into 4 small chapters in this boisterous picture book. There is gentle humour in each chapter where you get a peek inside this American family particularly at the brothers' relationship. They get up to kind of 'normal stuff' which is great. They don't have super powers, don't hate each other they just rub along together and this is a snapshot of their brotherhood.

The Lump story will resonate with any family where there are early risers versus trying to catch up sleep parents.

The Party has a lovely repeat in it which will appeal to readers-there's also opportunities for some cultural discussions as there are words more usual in America than the UK so this would definitely raise some discussions. *The Rocks* chapter ends with lots of humour and, again, has some repeating ideas so the book would be great for beginner readers because it has a really supportive structure. The size of the book makes it appealing in terms of fostering independent reading too. I've not come across many picture books in chapter form so it's great to see. Seeing the brothers get up to things, their underlying fondness for each other and a big dose of cheekiness makes for an entertaining read. **SG**

The Treasure of Pirate Frank

★★★★

Mal Peet and Elspeth Graham, illus Jez Tuya, Nosy Crow, 978-0-8576-3890-8, £6-99 pbk

This book celebrates the wonderfully creative talent of Mal Peet and his wife Elspeth Graham in partnership, it being one of the last stories they produced before Mal's death in 2015. The story, inspired by the tale, *The House that Jack Built*, has a rhyme that begs to be read aloud, one that children will join in readily. The illustrations leap from every spread with rumbustious energy, drawing in readers. A touch of gold on the cover adds to the initial thrill of opening this book, whilst there is a FREE Stories Aloud smartphone audio book facility tucked on the inside front cover by a scan of the QR code. A small boy, his map and his dog set off on aboard ship across the bright

blue sea. 'This is the boy who wants to find the treasure of Pirate Frank. This is the map that shows the way to the treasure of Pirate Frank.' So begins the adventure, as they cross snowy mountain tops, meet crowds of monkeys in the forests, encounter a swamp full of singing bullfrogs, a volcano that spits out fire, and climb steps that go higher and higher. All these sites are on the map that shows the way to the treasure of Pirate Frank. The accumulating text rings out in gripping rhythm as boy and dog traverse the various haunts, the pictures adding much to the text. Excitement mounts as the boy and faithful dog approach the tree that marks the spot... The treasure chest, at long last! But oh dear, standing upon it is Pirate Frank, and upon the chest reads a sign: 'This treasure belongs to pirate frank. Hands off!' Most unexpectedly, Pirate Frank is a fearsome looking girl! 'Quick! Run! Down the steps going lower, not higher...' And so boy and dog hastily retrace their journey back home, as in a renowned and much loved bear hunt picture book, all the way chased by the fiery Pirate Jack. This book should become a great classic, needing to be read aloud, with friends, with families, in classrooms, on high days and holidays, in libraries, in cafes, and high adventurous places all around the world. Let it fly! **GB**

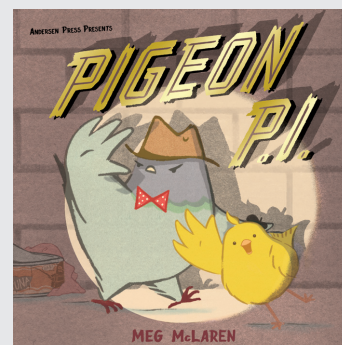
The Street Beneath My Feet

★★★★

Charlotte Guillain and Yuval Zommer, Words & Pictures, 978-1-7849-3731-7, £14.99 hbk

Have you ever wondered what is below the concrete of the pavement? Or watched the water rushing down the gutter into the drains? Where does it go? There is a whole world underneath the surface of our world and Guillain and Zommer have made it their business to effect an introduction.

Since the journey is digging down, their book has been designed with this in mind; it gradually unfolds as the reader travels through different layers, going ever deeper until the central core is reached. Then the traveller begins a journey back up to the surface. This allows the authors to pace the information that goes with each layer. The text is packaged neatly and delivered in small bites set against the continually changing landscape. Here are no photographs with captions. The illustrator draws us into this underground world populated with small creatures, technology, bones, minerals – and finally lava. The information is concise, direct and friendly in tone, designed to appeal to its young audience many of whom will be able to access it for themselves. From its attractive cover inviting the reader to open the book to the final dramatic cut-away earth, this is a welcome addition to the way information is being offered to children whether in school or at home. **FH**



Pigeon P.I.

★★★★

Meg McLaren, Andersen Press, 9781783444830, £12.99 hbk

Murray Pigeon has retired. He is no longer investigating crimes; or that's what he says. Then the Kid (aka Vee) in her jaunty black beret turns up with a tale of birdnapping. Even this does not tempt Pigeon P.I. But when she disappears, it is time to take action.

This is not a picture book for the youngest, perhaps – though hard-bitten Mums and Dads should appreciate it as a bedtime read. McLaren references the mean streets of the Chandler novels in her laconic text which mixes speech bubbles, details within the illustrations and the storyline told by Pigeon, himself. Her attractive soft-toned illustrations are inseparable from the storytelling and require the reader to explore each spread. And there is plenty to explore from the beginning to the final end papers. Jokes abound – the title itself will raise a smile – and young readers will quickly appreciate the partnership between Pigeon and the Kid. Not one to miss. **FH**

Town is by the Sea

★★★★

Joanne Schwartz, ill. Sydney Smith, Walker Books, 48pp, 978-1-4063-773-5, £11.99 hbk

This is one of those slow burn picture books, the impact of which lingers long after its covers have been closed. It takes readers to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, to the coalmining days of Cape Breton when many men spent their days toiling in mines beneath the sea.

Our young narrator is a boy, the son of a miner, and as the book opens his father is leaving his grassy hilltop home for work. The lad wakes and begins to reveal the details of his day's activities, and the routine life of his father. He uses the repeated 'it goes like this ...' phrase, which imbues the whole narrative with a timelessness.

The boy's world is expansive, outdoors – the grassy playground, the town shops, the graveyard where his grandfather is buried, the wide seascape. That of his father is dark and confined. 'And deep down under that sea, my father is digging for coal.' This repeat refrain provides a stark contrast between the two worlds and adds a subtle air of poignancy

reviews

5 – 8 Infant/Junior continued

throughout. All the more so because of the boy's words on the two final night time spreads, 'I think about the bright days of summer and the dark tunnels underground. One day it will be my turn. I'm a miner's son. In my town, that's the way it is.'

Sydney Smith's profoundly beautiful, evocative illustrations are breathtaking and perfectly in harmony with Schwartz's lyrical text. Executed in muted watercolour shades with occasional gouache, and with images thickly outlined in black, they alternate between the bright, sunlit world of hillside town and sea, and the sombre underground mine lit only by the toiling miners' lamps.

Eloquent, sensitive yet, entirely unsentimental and profound in impact: picture books don't get much better than this one. **JB**

All About Ella

★★★★

Sally Nicholls, illus Hannah Coulson, Barrington Stoke, 76pp, 978-1-7811-2533-5, £6.99pbk

Ella is the younger sibling of Sam. Sam has a serious through unspecified medical problem which necessitates periods in hospital and blood transfusion. Ella's teacher recites the poem *Solomon Grundy (born on a Monday)* and asks the children to find out on which day of the week they were born. Ella asks her mother, her father and her grandma. All the attention of the family is on Sam and his needs, they can't be bothered with Ella's stupid question. So Ella

develops a strong sibling resentment.

The book tells the story of how Ella struggles to establish her own place within the family. She eventually finds that having a brother, even one with serious health problems, can be useful.

The role and preoccupations of siblings to children with serious health or disability issues have been studied and reported by professional academic authorities. The child with the problem necessarily receives so much time and attention from parents, grandparents and carers that other children feel neglected and disregarded. They feel punished for not having a problem.

The merit of this Barrington Stoke book is that it presents the issue in a lively fictional context with helpful full-colour illustrations and that it does so without demonising the child with the health problem. **RB**

Shifty McGifty and Slippery Sam Up, Up and Away!

★★★★

Tracey Corderoy illus Steven Lenton, Nosy Crow, 978-0-8576-3848-9, £5.99 pbk

In these three stories, firm doggy friends Shifty McGifty and Slippery Sam are at work as professional bakers and part-time detectives. In *Up, Up and Away*, the two friends are taking part in the Rocky Road Race Day. Their shiny Bakemobile is running so smoothly along the bumpy roads that they are set to win the race. But then luck goes against them – or could it be that their annoying next-

door neighbour is cheating? In *To Catch a Thief*, they assume the roles of doorman and chamber maid at a posh hotel in order to trap whoever is stealing valuables from the guests. The *Mystery Parcel* shows them at odds with one another as each lays claim to the amazing dragon costume wrapped inside. In all three stories, cakes, sweets and all manner of culinary gadgets play a crucial role.

Capturing the ups and downs of friendship, the stories abound in slapstick humour and cheerfulness. The friends are considerate and loving, their actions generous and altruistic enough to overcome selfishness and quarrelsome moments. The stories are divided into short chapters to facilitate young readers yet the vocabulary and sentence constructions are at times quite difficult. The joyous illustrations in blue and black are fresh and exuberant, set as they often are on a lighter blue background. **AF**

Alphamals

★★★★

Graham Carter, Big Picture Press, 32pp, 978 1 78370 685 3, £10.99 hbk
A stunning collection of animals make up this beautiful alphabet book. Each spread shows a full colour animal illustration with an illuminated letter and a short verse offering some factual information about the animal. The artwork will appeal to anyone with an eye for graphic design, and the gorgeous colours make each page a beauty to behold. Elegant production as ever from **Big Picture Press** includes glorious endpapers, hardback format with gold leaf

detail and a thick luxurious paper. The animals included too, add some variety from the usual line-up, most notably the small but fierce Quoll, the mighty horned Urial and for that trickiest of letters, the X-ray Tetra fish. **Alphamals** makes a beautiful gift to start a young one's learning, or a handsome addition to any nature lover's library. **KC**

Are We There Yet?

★★★★

Dan Santat, Andersen Press, 32pp, 978 1 78344 516 5, £6.99pbk

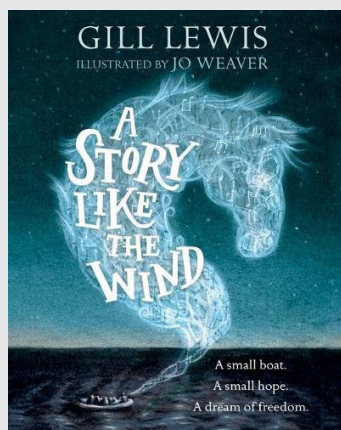
What happens when your brain gets too bored? A boy and his parents are on their way to wish Grandma a happy birthday when his brain turns the car journey on its head and suddenly he's missing out on all the adventures that are happening right outside his window. When he notices what is occurring he takes the books advice and savours the moment he's in. Pirates, dinosaurs and time-travel are all available to him, but soon he's ready for a nap and when he wakes up they've arrived at Grandma's house with the lesson that the present is the greatest gift of all. Moments later the boy is wishing his time away again as he's surrounded by elderly guests at the party; 'are we there yet?' has become 'can we go now?' Super stylish illustration and a fun page layout that invites you to turn the book upside down adds another dimension to this simple text. The power of imagination is on full display here and the message is simple but effective – don't miss the moment! **KC**

8 – 10 Junior/Middle

A Story Like the Wind

★★★★

Gill Lewis, ill. Jo Weaver, OUP, 80pp, 978-0-1927-5895-8, £8.99 hbk
A fourteen-year old boy Rami is adrift in a boat full of strangers from his homeland; his only possession and reminder of home is his precious violin. The small boat carries the promise of a new life away from the destruction of war but the engine has died and they are all alone in a treacherous sea. The travellers begin to tell each other their names and offer to share their food and drink but Rami feels he cannot take their hospitality as he has nothing to offer in return. But when he opens his violin case everyone begs him to play. As Rami begins to play the tension and fear in the boat loosens a little. The music tells the story of a young shepherd boy named Suke and a beautiful wild white stallion who could run like the wind. It is also the story of how the first violin came into being and how music has the ability to cross



barriers of race and language and can bring joy where there is darkness. As the story weaves its magic each family joins in by telling some of their own heart-breaking stories which mirror the cruel oppression of the Dark Lord in the story.

This is an extraordinarily striking and moving fable of love and loss and how the power of stories can transform lives, make connections and bring about change, uniting us in our common humanity. It is a lyrical and beautifully told tale giving a compassionate and emotional response to the refugee crisis. The haunting monochrome illustrations complement the text beautifully. This is a book that should be handed to all children and will resonate with all who read it. **JC**

Goodly and Grave In a bad case of Kidnap

★★★★

Justine Windsor Illus Becca Moor, HarperCollins, 978-0-0081-8353-0, 322pp, £6.99 pbk

Children are going missing all over the city. Who is behind it? Arriving at Grave Hall as the new Boot Girl, Lucy Goodly notices strange things afoot – moving statues, magical books – and clearly Lord Grave has a secret. Might

this be the link? It is up to Lucy to uncover the truth.

Debut author, Justine Winsor, has written a lively, enjoyable and very accessible adventure. There is plenty of humour (anchovy omelettes) and satisfying element of magic, a neat subversion of expectations – and a black panther. If the villains have more than a whiff of the pantomime, this just adds to the enjoyment. Lucy is a resourceful heroine, Lord Grave suitably enigmatic. To add to the pleasure of reading, Becca Moor has illustrated the text throughout. Her images provide welcome additions to what is quite a substantial read, not just as decoration but really enhancing the fun. This is set to be the first of a series and I suspect young Lucy will quickly gather a following. Recommended for KS2 readers who are both confident and hungry for books that provide a satisfying reading experience that is completely appropriate to their age. **FH**

New Talent

Mold and the Poison Plot

★★★★★

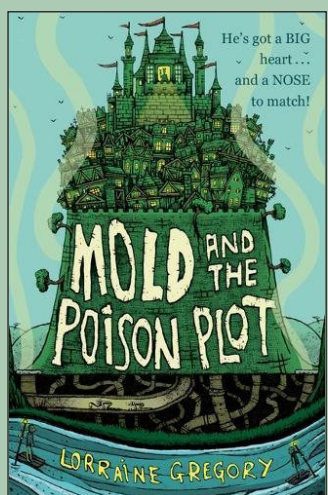
Lorraine Gregory, OUP, 224pp, 978-0-1927-4582-8, £6.99 pbk

In *Mold and the Poison Plot* we meet a wonderful new hero with a distinctive voice and an amazing ability to smell out danger. Mold is small and puny, but he has an enormous nose and a big heart. As a baby, he was found in a dustbin and adopted by Aggy, who makes a living from selling potions in the rag market. Although she drinks more than he would like, they are getting on well, living in the Dregs next to their friend Betsy, the one-legged sailor.

After a visit from a mysterious, tattooed stranger, Aggy is accused of poisoning the King, and carted off to the dungeons. Drawing on all his courage, Mold journeys to the city of Westenburg, with Betsy, to rescue her.

The story is set in the imaginary land called Pellegarno, made up of two islands. The fantastic cover illustration and map by Tom Mead help to bring it to life. Westenburg and the Dregs are on one island, and on the other live the green-skinned Skullenvar, in amongst the swamps.

Mold faces danger after danger as he plunges deep into the underworld of the city and even crawls through sewers to get to the castle. This is a vividly



realised fantasy world, with lots of blood and gore, stinky smells and strange plants and creatures. The baddies are truly bad and the book doesn't shy away from violence and gruesome detail.

Mold finds out how the desire for power has led to horrendous deeds, and how hatred between different peoples has meant his race – the Dai Kullen – have been virtually wiped out. His acute sense of smell is central to the plot, enabling him to distinguish between people he can trust and the true villains. He is a wonderful creation; a lovable and funny character who takes you with him every step of the way on his big adventure. **LT**

Tales from Weird Street

★★★★★

Anne Fine, ill. Vicki Gausden, Barrington Stoke, 64pp, 978-1-7811-2572-4, £5.99 pbk

Three friends living on Weir Street challenge each other to tell stories about the strange and uncanny happenings in the neighbourhood they secretly name 'Weird Street'. Tom's story tells of how his great-grandpa's brother drowned, right after his wavering outline in a photograph gave a watery warning. In Laila's tale an empty fortune cookie predicts a short future for a rowdy customer and Asim's story tells of Macie, haunted by a strange dream of her future home.

Anne Fine has written a trio of unexpected tales, with just the right amount of creepiness, unease and suspense for the intended age range of 8+, cleverly linked by the device of children living on the same street. Are the stories true or just coincidence? Readers can decide for themselves as they absorb this skilfully written collection in the Barrington Stoke series. The characteristic dyslexia-friendly layout and production give extra accessibility to what is already a very readable set of linked stories. **SR**

Jack and the Geniuses: At the Bottom of the World

★★★

Bill Nye and Gregory Mone, ill. Nick Iluzada, Amulet Books, 230pp, 978-1-4197-2303-2, £8.99 pbk

This exciting new series introduces readers to a new family of adventurous children. Ava, Matt and Jack are foster siblings and have been through a lot together. They are also complete geniuses. Well, Matt and Ava are, Jack is just ordinary, and his long-suffering voice narrates the novel.

Jack does not enjoy the constant belittling and patronisation that he suffers at the hands of his gifted brother and sister, but it will be difficult for readers to muster up the sympathy he clearly craves, as there are some major advantages to Jack's situation; an all-expenses trip to Antarctica for a science convention, for example, and a house robot who constantly makes pizza.

Jack, Ava and Matt are taken to the South Pole by the famous genius, Hank Witherspoon, who has clearly identified potential in the minds of Ava and Matt. They share the research station with a host of similarly impressive scientists, including inventors, explorers and even karaoke experts! These brilliant

brains soon become a list of suspects when a reckless biologist goes missing somewhere out on the ice. The rest of the story plays out as a mystery, and it's up to Jack and his genius siblings to find the culprits – which isn't easy as every suspect is a total mastermind!

Though there is plenty of intrigue to maintain readers' interest, this debut novel doesn't quite deliver the level of action or energy suggested by the action-filled cover illustration. Nor is it quite geeky enough for fans of science for whom it is clearly marketed. There are lots of fun gadgets and gizmos to spark the interest of young engineers, but Matt and Ava are afforded little room to really celebrate their enormous mathematical and scientific intellects.

Jack and his geniuses are clearly up for solving plenty of new mysteries in the future, and with Jack's tendency to get into trouble, they're bound to find themselves embroiled in a new adventure before long. Readers of this first episode will hope that the young protagonists are allowed to show-off a little more in the next instalment. **SD**

The Boy, the Bird & the Coffin Maker

★★★★★

Matilda Woods, illustrated by Anuska Allepuz, Scholastic, 198pp, 978-1-4071-7869-1, £6.99 pbk

This story reads like a magical new fairy tale. It's a gentle story about a sad man, Alberto, who lives in the faraway town of Allora, famous for its flying fish and the many varied colours of its bright houses. Alberto is the coffin maker, and he takes great care in looking after the dead people who are brought to him before burial. He is a kind, sad man, who has been living alone ever since his whole family died in a plague thirty years ago.

One day, he notices that someone is taking food from his kitchen. But when he sets out to catch the thief, he finds that it is just a scared little boy and his companion, a magical bird called Fia. Gradually, Alberto wins the trust of the boy, Tito, and together they learn to be happy again. Tito is in hiding, though, from his brutal father, and there's a real sense of menace as the danger gets closer and closer.

The town of Allora is vividly and humorously brought to life, with a fine cast of characters such as the nosy neighbours Clara and Rosa, the pompous mayor who is as wide as he is tall, and the baker Enzo who provides triple cream gateaux and strawberry jam.

There's a tale within a tale, as Alberto reads to Tito in the evenings from a book called *The Story of Isola*. The story captures their imagination and adds another level of meaning to the narrative, already rich with allusions to fairy tales and legends.

The illustrations make this lyrical story even more beautiful and the message of hope and love rising out of despair and loneliness makes this a satisfying, comforting read. **LT**

Song for Will and the Lost Gardens of Heligan

★★★★★

Hilary Robinson, illus. Martin Impey, Strauss House Productions, 72pp, 978-0-9571-2453-0, £14.99

Here's another wonder full poetry This gorgeous book moved me to tears. It tells how, when World War One broke out, the majority of the staff of Heligan Gardens left their employment and went off to fight, and how tragically, many did not come back. It takes the form of correspondence between the narrator Alfie, too young to join up, and Fred, the Garden's stonemason who enlisted.

Through their letters we are provided with completely contrasting viewpoints: errand boy Alfie's letters tell of the day-to-day maintenance of the Gardens and the lives of those left behind; how they were impacted by the war, trying to stay upbeat while missing loved ones and workmates away at war, dreading bad news and struggling with rationing, and sometimes, grief.

The letters Fred sends Alfie tell vividly of life on the front line, the on-going difficulties he has to cope with, the constant risks from illness on account of terrible conditions – the wet, the bitter cold, 'rats the size of cats'; how he misses his family.

There is news too in their correspondence of his close friend, gardener Will Guy who joined up at the same time as Fred although the two went separate ways: Will to the Western Front; Fred to Greece. Alfie tells Fred that, after returning home briefly in 1916, 'I noticed that Will's hand was shaking – he must have been excited to be back'. He talks later of how on another visit home in 1917, Will's brother reports, 'Will's hand was shaking so much in chapel'. Then just over a year after, he writes of the arrival of a telegram for Will's mother who learns that her son was killed in action in 1918. Shock and grief take over for a while as kind, gentle Will is mourned, not only by the humans who loved him, but also seemingly, by his animal friends.

The correspondence is reproduced in Martin Impey's illustrations, almost in facsimile, tea stains and all, though illuminated and embellished with visual images drawn from Hilary Robinson's poetic writing. Together they have a heart-wrenching profundity and at the same time make the human story all the more harrowingly real for readers. We see 1915 scenes of Christmas at Heligan; and in snowy Salonika where Fred's fears of malaria, jostle with those of the honeybees back home. Each in its own intimate way is full of passion and beauty. Indeed intimacy is a word that describes the sensation one is left with after closing this book: you really get the feeling that you know each and every one of its characters, and are involved in their experiences throughout; and afterwards.

Pitch perfect for sharing with children and for leading them into

reviews

8 – 10 Junior/Middle continued

talking about life as a WW1 soldier and the life of those who carried on supporting their loved ones while going about their toil at home. Equally though it's a very special book to read and cherish at home. **JB**

The Lottery plus one

★★★★

Emma Donoghue, illus Caroline Hadilaksono, Macmillan, 978-1-5098-0319-4, 303pp, £10.99 hbk
Sumac is looking forward to the summer - and in particular her project on Ancient Mesopotamia. The news that the family - already numbering seven kids, four parents and assorted pets - is going to become one more is not welcome. The newcomer is their grumpy, opinionated grandfather who does not fit in. Sumac decides she will have to do something about the situation.



Emma Donoghue has already made a name for herself with her adult novels. Now she turns her talents to writing for a much younger audience - and proves a very welcome addition to world of children's books. She creates a warm-hearted, eccentric family community that encompasses all ages - and all backgrounds; for the Lotterys are very much a blended family. The writing is assured and her characters emerge full of life and in glorious technicolour. This is no ordinary family, but there will be many young readers who either in imagination or even reality will recognise themselves. And what happens when the 'normal' meets the different? For confident readers who want a thoroughly enjoyable read that is both thoughtful and fun this must be recommended. Let us hope Emma Donoghue will continue to write in this way, joining authors in a tradition exemplified by Eve Garnett, Elizabeth Enright and Hilary McKay. **FH**

King Coo

★★★★

Adam Stower, David Fickling, 172pp, 978-1-9102-0060-5, £9.99 hbk

Strange things are afoot in town; huge holes are appearing everywhere and something has to be done. Meanwhile life goes on as normal for Ben Pole, trying to avoid the ghastly Monty Crabbe and his gang. On the run after school his escape route down a blind alley leads to one of these holes and at the other end a strange world. This world is presided over by King Coo and her pet wombat.

King Coo lives in a tree house wears nothing but a crown and a beard (yes a full length flowing, golden beard that completely covers her modesty). From this vantage point she and Ben defend themselves against Monty Crabbe and his gang with Cow-pat-a-pults, Slug Pulp and a Springy-Flingy-Thing.

This is a classic romp: bullied boy meets strange new friend and conquers his persecutors in the most convoluted and funny way possible. None of it is ground breaking, apart from the wombat, but it will entertain and amuse its readers.

The format is a good mixture of text and black and white illustrations, including drawings of the clever plans King Coo come up with. At a vital point when Buster Crabbe enlists Ted Dedleigh the pest control man to capture the wombat and win a the bajillion pound reward, the whole text turns into a cartoon strip format. That really adds interest to what could have been quite a simple piece of conversation and turns it into a dark and dastardly episode.

The text is fun and moves along but the illustrations make the narrative. **CD**

The Wooden Camel

★★★★

Wanuri Kahiu, Manuela Adreani illus, Lantana, 978-1-9113-7313-1, 32pp £7.99 pbk

Etabo dreams of racing camels just as his brothers do. His siblings make fun of him as he is so little, but Etabo knows he could be faster than any of them. When his father sells their flock of camels as they can no longer afford them Etabo is devastated. He prays to the Sky God for help and is told 'Your dreams are enough.' Etabo isn't convinced, he tries riding chickens, cats and goats but that just isn't the same. Meanwhile, his sister Akiru has been watching, realising how sad Etabo is she makes him a herd of wooden camels. In his imagination the toy camels come to life, and he can race them. It seems his dreams are enough after all.

Produced by Lantana publishing who specialise in culturally diverse books, this first picturebook from Kenyan filmmaker Kahiu is written sensitively and with humour. The text is complemented by Italian illustrator Adreani's attractive illustrations

which bring the Kenyan landscape and its people to life. A story about the power of imagination and hanging onto your dreams. **SMC**

Elias Martin

Nicola Davies illustrated by Fran Shum, Graffeg, 978-1-9108-6250-6,

The Selkie's Mate

Nicola Davies illustrated by Claire Jenkins Graffeg, 978-1-9108-6249-0

★★★★

Shadows and Light series, Graffeg, 40pp, £8.99 hbk

Both of these titles are part of the series created by Nicola Davies in which she takes traditional folk or fairytales that allow her to explore our relationship with the natural world. Beautifully packaged by Graffeg these are a very welcome addition to the bookshelves and should be made available side by side with the fiction sequence.

Elias Martin is, perhaps, the less familiar of the two tales presented here. A variation on the traditional story *The Snow Child* in which a couple are granted their desire for a child, only to lose her when summer comes. Here, Elias is a hunter; a man warped by his experiences, at war with the world around him. The arrival of a child - naked, abandoned - gives him a new focus but he still sees the natural world, the wolverine, as his adversary. Therein lies his tragedy.

Fran Shum's bold line drawing capture the stark power of the story. There is no sentimentality here and Davies' prose, though literary, echoes the voice of the storyteller. No moral is drawn - that is for the reader.

The Selkie's Mate will be much more familiar to its audience. The tale of the fisherman who captures a seal maiden, then hides her skin to prevent her return to the sea is well known, appearing in many anthologies and can be read in many different ways. Here Davies picks up her theme of the danger that lies in failing to work with the natural world; of imposing our will upon it and disregarding what should be a compact. The illustrations by Claire Jenkins echo the sea background through her use of clear watercolour wash, complementing the storyteller's voice, capturing the shifting colours of the island landscape. Aimed at an older audience - top KS2/KS3 - these are powerful stories that have stood the test of time and still resonate today. **FH**

The Hounds of Penhallow Hall: The Moonlight Statue

★★★

Holly Webb, illus Jason Cockcroft, Little Tiger, 978-1-8471-5660-0, £5.99 pbk

Polly and her mum are seeking a fresh start after Dad's fatal accident. They are moving to Cornwall, to Penhallow Hall, a four-hundred-year-old home now open to the public, where Mum has taken a job as House Manager. The rambling house harbours vast rooms and treasures - and a constant

stream of visitors - and the gardens are lush, with large terraces, broad steps, statues and lawns, one of which leads to a sandy cove. One moonlit night, while sleepwalking, Polly wanders onto the terrace, towards the two large dog statues that guard the steps. One of them comes alive, explaining that he is the ghost of an ancient dog. Shortly after this encounter, Polly discovers that the house too has its ghostly secrets, as is revealed by a sepia print, taken in 1915, of a young boy in uniform, heir to the Penhallow estate. The story is suspenseful and maintains paces to the end. Thanks to Polly, the ghostly figures find peace while they, in turn, help her come to terms with her new life. The old house and gardens are important elements, adding mystery, mood and magic to the unfolding of events. Dark and shadowy drawings capture the other-worldliness of the story. **AF**

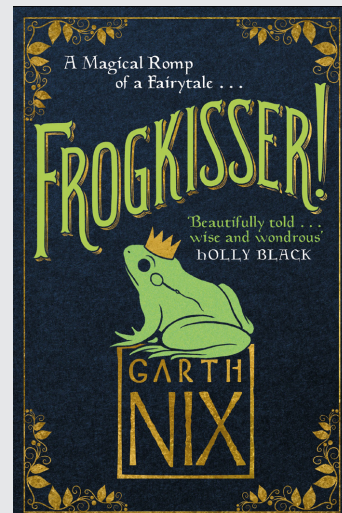
Frogkisser

★★★★

Garth Nix, Piccadilly Press, 378pp, 978-1-8481-2601-5, £10.99 hbk

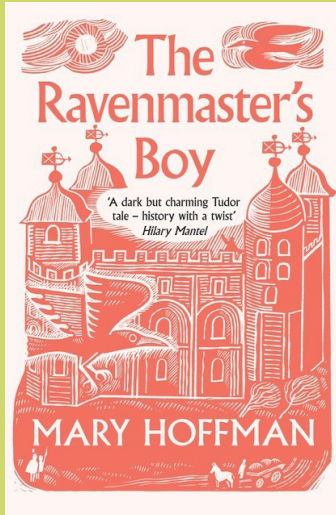
This charming story opens with Princess Anya helpfully rescuing a frog, one of her older sister's suitors. But Princess Morven refuses to kiss it to turn it back into prince Denholm and the only way to return the prince to his true form depends on a special lip balm. But the lip balm has run out and before she can work out how to make some more Princess Anya discovers her step stepfather, the evil sorcerer Prince Rikard, has plans to send her away to school on a perilous journey from which she is unlikely to return. There is nothing for it but to set off on a quest to find the ingredients to make the lip balm accompanied by one of the trusty royal dogs Ardent.

They are joined on their journey by some wonderfully oddball characters; Shrub a would-be thief who has been turned into a large newt, Smoothie the otter who has been turned into a half human plus any amount of frogs to be turned back into their rightful form. They gain the trust and help of allies along the way from Roberta



Special Review Mary Hoffman

8 – 10 Junior/Middle
continued



The Ravenmaster's Boy

★★★★★

Mary Hoffman, Greystones Press, 224pp, 978-1-9111-2213-5, £8.99 hbk

Mary Hoffman's latest novel is set in the Tower of London in the weeks leading up to the execution of Anne Boleyn. It stars young Kit Wagstaffe, adopted son of the Ravenmaster, and cleverly mixes real life events with a skilfully imagined story of intrigue and magic. Figures familiar from history lessons are made vivid, breathing characters in this exciting story and though we know how it ends for Anne readers will be moved and saddened viewing events through Kit's eyes. This is proof of historical fiction's power to grip and entertain. **AR**



Mary explains her approach to her book and to retelling a story we've all studied at school.

'I will provide the blood'

This year sees the 481st anniversary of the execution of Anne Boleyn. Not a nice neat commemorative number. But just consider: it's nearly 500 years ago and the fascination with a woman who was queen consort of England for only three years is as intense as ever.

Wolf Hall and **Bring up the Bodies** have been Man Booker prize winners, sold out plays in Stratford and London and TV ratings successes. How was I to write about the well-known story of the four months in 1536 that took Anne from beloved favourite to headless wife?

'all well-known stories are new to someone, especially a young reader'

The first thing I had to remind myself of is that all the well-known stories are new to someone, especially a young reader. I wanted to write my novel with the story unfolding, just as it might have appeared to a teenage boy in the sixteenth century. A boy who had decided he was a fan of Anne Boleyn.

My way in was through the ravens in the Tower of London. Once I had the idea of making my protagonist a plague orphan, rescued by the Ravenmaster at the Tower and able to speak Raven, the rest of the story came easily. I made an appointment to see Chris Skaife, the current Ravenmaster and asked if I could bring anything for the birds – what did they like to eat?

His reply sealed our friendship before we met: 'Dog biscuits soaked in blood. I will provide the blood.' I visited and was introduced to the very large black birds, my favourite being Merlin, who is actually a female. But I discovered that the ravens, contrary to popular belief, are not reliably documented as being in the Tower before the 19th century.

But I was writing fiction and, as long as I put a note at the end, as I do in all my historical novels, it would be an acceptable invention. Several more visits with the ravens followed, along with much research.

Blood was going to be an issue for this novel throughout. You can't sanitise a story that ends in six decapitations. What you need is a twist that brings some sort of hope with it. So I thought about the child, Princess Elizabeth, who was rendered motherless at under three years old. I have a grandson of that age and I don't know what his future holds but I'm pretty sure he's not going to be a monarch who defines his era.

And nor did anyone know that the little girl with the red-gold curls was going to be that. Surely her life would have been in danger, as the newly illegitimised daughter of a woman convicted of treason and multiple adultery? There were some who had pressed for the death rather than divorce of Katherine of Aragon and her daughter. Why not assume the same this time around? When Anne was being dispensed with so cruelly and swiftly?

So there was my plot, with the magical ravens and the gifted boy, who becomes the doomed queen's servitor and knight. Kit champions the little princess, at least partly, because he knows what it is to lose a mother, even though he is a happy part of the Ravenmaster's household now.

He is helped by Isabel, the baker's daughter, Alice the Lieutenant's daughter and Mossy Meg, whom some would call a witch. And of course by the ravens, whose language he knows and who, at the end, can tell a variety of different stories about how Anne's fate might have played out in different versions of our history.

I provided the blood. But it comes with a taste of hope. A message we need today.

(Bert) the Robin Hood-like leader of the Association of Responsible Robbers plus a Good Wizard who has a fabulous line in glamorous shoes, not to mention the numerous lookalike Gerald the Heralds who turn up everywhere and speak only in headlines.

Along the way Princess Anya learns a lot about life; how power corrupts, that loyalty of one's friends is paramount and how important it is to do the right thing. Her growing sense of responsibility plus her natural quick wittedness gives her the courage she needs to defeat Prince Rikard in the final battle. This novel has everything you could possibly want in a fairytale and more - humour, wit, a feisty princess and of course frogs. There are nods to every classic fantasy you have ever read here and the whole makes for a supremely satisfying read. It's a handsome production and has some very lovely frog endpapers too. **JC**

Ella Queen of Jazz

★★★★★

Helen Hancocks, Frances Lincoln, 978-1-8478-0918-6, 32pp, £11.99 hbk

Ella Queen of Jazz is a beautiful book telling through words and pictures the true story of Ella Fitzgerald (the first lady of song) her rise to fame in fifties America and her friendship with Hollywood icon Marilyn Monroe. Ella's talent and success are very well known but perhaps less so the obstacles she faced along the way. Top venues operated a colour bar, black performers were not welcome. It was the intervention of Marilyn Monroe which made the difference for Ella and contributed to her international stardom.

With themes of prejudice, the power of friendship and standing up for what you feel is right there is lots for young readers to think about in this stylish picturebook. Preconceptions of Marilyn Monroe (often portrayed as the archetypal dumb blonde) are challenged too. The mini biographies included at the back of the book are an added bonus.

This year marks the centenary of Ella Fitzgerald's birth and is the perfect time to celebrate her success and find out more about her incredible story. **SMC**

8 – 10 Junior/Middle
continued

10-14 Middle/Secondary



Sky Thieves

★★★★★

Dan Walker, Oxford Children's Books, 304pp, 978-0-1927-4701-3, £6.99pbk

Sky-high adventures on an air-ship crewed by Robin Hood style pirates and a life or death battle against an evil nemesis make Dan Walker's new book a thrilling read from beginning to end.

When we first meet her, our main protagonist orphan Zoya Delarose is in trouble yet again for her rebellious nature; by the end of the second chapter however, Zoya has been snatched away from the orphanage by the crew of the Dragonfly, a ship full of sky thieves – buccaneers who rob from the rich to help the poor and, it turns out, former ship-mates of her parents. Yes, the sky thieves are the goodies and the thoroughly unpleasant baddie is one Lendon Kane, the kind of duplicitous, power-mad, avaricious villain that we love to hate. Kane wants what's round Zoya's neck, a locket that opens the door to her parents' secret treasury in which is hidden the mysterious Algrond Crystal. Before long the Dragonfly is just the kind of home Zoya has always wanted (and one that readers will envy), one that allows her to climb the mast whenever she needs to escape, and where lessons are in sword fighting not maths. The crew – larger than life characters to a man and woman – quickly become her family and the strong sense of camaraderie marks the book out as much as the action sequences. The air-ship shudders and creaks its way through the air, a tangible creation of ropes, planks and rigging, and an encounter with a meteor shower is particularly vivid.

To adult readers the plot may feel familiar but the vigour of the telling make this something special while young readers will dream of slashing their way through forests and enemies with Zoya. **MMa**

Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls

★★★★★

Elena Favilli, Francesca Cavallo, Particular Books, 212pp, 978 0 141 98600 5, £17.99 hbk

Written in bedtime story style, with a hundred mini biographies of significant women throughout history and from across the globe, this is a fascinating book. Readers are introduced to Egyptian pharaohs Hatshepsut and Cleopatra, present day politicians Aung San Suu Kyi and Hilary Clinton and activists Malala Yousafzai and Wangari Maathai. Significant women from the worlds of science, the arts, archaeology, espionage, exploration and athletics are included. Some names such as Florence Nightingale, Rosa Parks and Michelle Obama are well known but many are virtually unknown.

We discover the struggles many women have had to fulfil their potential in the face of constant opposition or obstinate lack of recognition. In some cases, such as Hatshepsut the first female pharaoh, being almost erased from history.

The writers researched carefully, consciously including countries not frequently represented in western print media such as Niger with the story of activist Balkissa Chaibu and the 'Cholita Climbers'; mountaineers from Bolivia. From a UK perspective there are fewer entries than might be expected with a much higher percentage from the US. Perhaps UK children could consider who they might like to add to the collection and do some research of their own?

This is a significant project, published after a successful crowdfunding campaign. Concerned about what they perceive as continued gender stereotyping in media, the writers aimed to show that girls can be heroic and do amazing things too. Interviewed by Bookseller magazine co-author Elena Favilli said: 'You don't have to be a boy to make extraordinary things or do adventurous things. You can be adventurous on your own.'

This is a very attractive book with striking illustrations; full page portraits by sixty female artists are displayed alongside each mini biography. There is space at the back for young readers to write their own story or ambitions. The quotes on each page are a lovely addition, for example, this from Hillary Clinton after her presidential campaign:

'To every little girl who dreams big, I say, yes you can be anything you want, even president.'

A book to open all children's eyes to the role of women in our world's ongoing story and inspire young girls to follow their dreams. **SMc**

Small Things

★★★★★

Mel Tregonning, Allen and Unwin, 40pp, 978-1-7433-6872-5, £16.99hbk

Mel Tregonning's wordless black and white graphic novel, completed and published after she took her own life, is extraordinarily beautiful and a powerful, moving representation of depression.

Its central character is a young boy and a series of comic strip frames show us the ordinary but agonising misery of his day at school; excluded from conversations and games by his classmates, he's overwhelmed by loneliness and embarrassment. Lessons offer no respite, and while he's struggling with maths we notice strange shapes in the shadows he casts. These small things increase in number, and become a pretty well permanent presence; strange and spiky, faceless but with sharp teeth, they trail after him in the day and surround his bed at night, threatening and sinister, literally eating him up as cracks and crevices appear in his skin.

The depth of the boy's anxiety and despair are unmissable in the finely worked pencil illustrations, to the extent that it almost feels too much, too oppressive. Tregonning does allow him a way out however – his family and sister help him and it seems that he can drive the shapes back into the shadows at least. The final spread shows that he's not alone and that the other children at school are also tormented by worries, the same shapes swooping after them too.

Readers will marvel both at Mel Tregonning's skill and at the intensity of her vision. Many too will understand exactly how her character feels and one hopes they will take comfort and reassurance from the book. **MM**

#Help, my cat's a vlogging superstar!

★★★★★

Rae Earl, Walker, 247pp, 9781406367973, £6.99 pbk

This is the story of the trials and tribulations of Millie Porter as she tries to cope with her changing family life and the pressures of being on social media. Millie decides to go and live with her father and grandfather after her mother's boyfriend becomes too obsessive about cleaning the house. At the same time she is coping with being a target for the school 'queen' Erin, who is on Instagram and has a successful lifestyle vlog. Eventually Millie decides to fight back and starts her own advice vlog, but then her cat Dave decides to lend a hand. Suddenly life becomes even more complicated.

Whilst this is a funny and charming story, it is also a somewhat salutary tale about the modern world and the pressures that young people feel. Millie comes across as a very likeable young girl who thinks that

she is quite sensible, but as outsiders we can see the anxiety that she has and also the conflicts that are part of everyday life. It is very much a story about family and about friendship; reminding us that it is the people who surround us who are really important, not the 'friends' that we have on social media. As an adult it is good to be reminded that young people really do feel threatened by things that happen online and they are more heavily connected to this world than we are. I am not sure that this book provides any answers but it does show the readers that they are not alone in their insecurities. It is one of a growing number of stories that have social media as the central focus and is able to deliver its message without seeming to be 'preaching' to the audience. This is a book that can be read from year 6 upwards; although we are all aware the children tend to gravitate towards books that are cited as being for slightly older readers. **MP**

Dragonfly Song

★★★★★

Wendy Orr, Allen & Unwin, 393pp, 9781743369029, £6.99pbk

The world of the Bronze Age Mediterranean is something that we know a little bit about, particularly when it relates to Knossos and its Bull Culture. Aissa was born on a small island that paid tribute to the Cretan King in the form of young teens; they would then be trained for the bull jumping events that were part of the religious rites. However Aissa was born with additional 'fingers' on each hand and had been sent away to die, luckily she was saved and looked after by a farming family. After they were killed in a raid she found her way to the temple and worked as a general skivvy. She was known as 'No-name' because she had lost the ability to speak after the shock of the raid. After a variety of twists and turns she finds herself among the group being shipped to Crete for training. The consequences would change not only her life but also those of her fellow islanders.

This is a stunning story of survival against the odds and of how destiny cannot be avoided. The story is written in two separate but interlinked styles; most of it is in standard prose but it is interspersed with sections in verse, much as you would find in ancient Greek works. We see the central character grow and develop as she gradually realises that she does have a value and that no one should be looked down on because they do not look or sound like others. Whilst this is a very personal story of a young girl and her struggles to overcome many difficulties, it is also the story of a lost culture that we can catch glimpses of in the ruins of Knossos. This is an outstanding story,

both for those who love their history and for those who want to read about inspiring individuals. **MP**

See How They Lie

★★★★★

Sue Wallman, Scholastic, 312pp, 9781407165387, £7.99 pbk

Hummingbird Creek is an upmarket retreat for teenagers with psychological problems. Mae has grown up there with her parents, who own and run the facility. The strict rules and regulations are normal for Mae and the other children of staff; they are just something they have always lived with. For the young people who are sent there for help, it is just another medical facility but with the kind of resources that you would find at a truly 6 star hotel resort. However for the children of the staff there are rules that make life very restricted and they have to endure the sort of medical monitoring that you would only expect for people who are seriously ill. The teenagers find that even their education is being limited and their college choice is being decided for them. However they are now growing up and when Mae breaks the rules (she is caught smoking with a friend) she is led to question the very harsh results of this behaviour.

The description of life in Hummingbird Creek gives you a shiver down the back and has eerie similarities to some of the small sects that developed in the USA in the last 50 years. As you read this story you begin to feel that there is something sinister behind all this and the author gradually ratchets up the tension until she reaches her final crescendo. The characterisation is well done and we really feel for the two central teenagers who find their whole world seems to have been built on very insecure foundations. For Mae this is even more of an issue as there are several aspects of her life which are thrown into question (I am trying to avoid a 'spoiler' here). I found this a very gripping read with lots of tension between the adults and the young people. It was also interesting to note the different reactions of the young people to their environment; some appeared to accept the whole set-up, whilst others began to question. You can see how this could be translated into the wider picture of society, where a dictator can 'brainwash' people into believing their way is right and only a few people seem to question what is happening. **MP**

The Cherry Pie Princess

★★★★★

Vivian French, ill. Marta Kissi, Walker Books, 171pp, 9781406368970 pbk

This book really made me smile. It's about the very sassy, bright and kind Princess Peony who seems to be the odd one out in her royal family of selfish sisters, a rather vague+vacuous mum and as she discovers a tyrant of a father.

When her find out her Governess is called Miss. Beef I think we probably have a fair idea about Peony's lack of loveliness in her life.

For obvious reasons I have a favourite quote where Peony is excited because her governess is allowing the princesses to go to the library-none of Peony's sisters are impressed but she is and manages to find a book about pies (hence the title). For various reasons Peony has the book for a long time but when she finally returns it she reveals what her governess thinks about libraries. I have a favourite quote: "She says reading gives people ideas, and no princess wants those."

Thank goodness Peony uses her brain in this story and disobeys Miss. Beef. She has to foil a plot to stop a wicked witch who hasn't been invited to her baby brother's christening, she strives to put right the wrongs of her despotic father who likes putting everybody in the dungeons including the poor librarian and generally sprinkles generosity, humour and intelligence where she goes. It is a treat of a read as the characters are great fun and Marta Kissi's illustrations add to the spirit.

There are many nods to fairytales-I think older children would like this book too as it is multi layered. There are ideas about what it is to be a girl, to be a royal, to not conform, to want to learn and not be fickle. There are recognisable characters from many fairytales too-this would be a lovely way in to a fairy tale theme in KS2 as it's got so much potential for multi directions.

It's a very funny charming read and I'd recommend to brighten your day. **SG**

William Wenton and the Luridium Thief

★★★★★

Bobbie Peters, Walker Books, 256 pp, 978 1 4063 7170 3, £6.99 pbk

William Wenton and his family have been living in Norway for eight years. They moved there from London, at the same time as his famous code-breaking grandfather disappeared. Twelve-year old William has inherited his grandfather's skills, and spends all his spare time reading, and solving puzzles and codes. On a school trip to the History of Science Museum, William's code-breaking genius is revealed when he can't resist solving an Impossible Puzzle. Mayhem ensues when shortly afterwards he is kidnapped and taken to the mysterious Institute for Post-Human Research. He encounters a fantastic array of robots, and animated objects such as his friendly room door. William makes friends with one of the other gifted 'candidates' at the Institute, Iscia, and they set out to solve the mystery of what has happened to his grandfather, and a mysterious intelligent substance called Luridium.

This novel has all the ingredients

of a successful thriller for children; a hero with super-powers, a school for gifted children and a whole host of animated objects with personalities. It's not surprising that it's already being made into a film. Great fun! **LT**

The Little Book of Wetland Bird Sounds

★★★★★

Andrea Pinnington & Caz Buckingham, Fine Feather Press, 978-1-9084-8931-9, 24pp, £12.99 board

The sound of birdsong seems to have been louder and more joyful than ever this spring, but perhaps that is thanks to this wonderful series of books in teaching us to recognise individual bird sounds. The marriage of a soundbar including twelve different bird sounds with photos and information works brilliantly. All the recordings are of excellent quality and of a sufficient length to be helpful in recognising a bird's unique call. And what could be more magical than the soulful cry of the curlew or the haunting call of the black-throated diver. The honking of the mute swan and the explosive calls of the coot, the chatter of the reed warbler and the quacking of mallards are familiar sounds to one who grew up alongside water, but the alarm call of the kingfisher was entirely unfamiliar, and the avocet all-too rarely heard. Plenty of useful information on habitat, nesting and behaviour is included in each bird portrait, along with snippets of interesting facts. Produced in association with the **Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)** the cover gives brief details on where to find out more about visiting the ten wetland centres and reserves in the UK. There is also a helpful note on replacing the batteries to prolong the life of the book. If you don't already know this excellent series, look out for the companion volumes **The Little Book of Garden Bird Songs, Woodland Bird Songs and Night Time Animal Sounds. SU**

100 Steps for Science

★★★

Lisa Jane Gillespie, ill. Yukai Du, Wide Eyed Editions, 978-1-8478-0805-9, 64pp, £14.99 hbk

A colourful approach to science in the broadest of sweeps, taking ten separate strands and breaking them down into ten steps that trace scientific discoveries and breakthroughs. Opening with a chapter on Space, there are sections on Mapping the Night Sky, Marking Time and Navigating by Stars, leading on to Space Exploration. This is followed by a chapter on Wheels, from log rollers to turbines and renewable energy. Next comes Numbers, tracing the history of mathematics from the first recorded hieroglyphic numbers through geometry and algebra before arriving at modern-day computing, all in six busy pages taking in Einstein and Alan Turing along the way. The order seems somewhat random,

with chapters on Sound and Light separated from Energy; Medicine separated from Life. But if you like your information busy and presented in piecemeal format, then this may fit the bill. Yukai Du's artwork follows a consistent palette, very much in the style of other **Wide Eyed** titles, part diagrammatic, part background scene-setting but with a vibrant energy of its own. The text is quite dense, in a small typesize with a complex layout so would be more suitable for competent readers. A detailed glossary is included but, oh dear, no index. **SU**

Reaching the Stars

★★★

Jan Dean, Liz Brownlee and Michaela Morgan, Macmillan, 112pp, 978-1-5098-1428-2, £5.99, pbk

The extraordinary women and girls celebrated in verse here range from Elizabeth I and Boudicca to Frida Kahlo and Malala Yousafzai. As with all such lists, there are omissions. Extraordinary here tends to mean have been a force for good, so no female murderers, revolutionaries or politicians (excepting suffragettes or civil rights activists). Role models then, really, with an otherwise impressive range across cultures and professions. Each poem is introduced with a factual paragraph about its subject. There isn't necessarily a problem with writing poems to order. Sometimes it sets a challenge to which a writer can bring all their imagination and craft. And there are poems like that here. But there are also many where you don't feel that you've learnt more about the subject or that the poet has brought anything different to the poem, except perhaps a rhyming scheme. So the more interesting poems to me are the ones where the poets can range a little more widely or reveal something of themselves: Jan Dean's *I Watch the film of Helen Keller*, which wonders how Anne Sullivan could bear to use her body as a teaching instrument; Michaela Morgan's *Hunger Strike*, which surprisingly sets the formality of middle class dining against the



10 – 14 Middle/Secondary continued

force feeding of a suffragette; and Liz Brownlee's *I am the Very Model of a Modern Girl from Planet Earth* which wittily sets out a range of career choices available to the contemporary young woman with thanks to Gilbert and Sullivan. **CB**

Anglo-Saxon Boy

★★★★

Tony Bradman, illus. Sam Hart, Walker, 236pp, 978-1-4063-6377-7, £5.99 pbk

In this companion title to *Viking Boy* Tony Bradman tells the story behind the Battle of Hastings through the eyes of fifteen-year-old Magnus, whose father is Harold Godwinson, lord of the Southern Saxons and future king of England, destined to die in battle against Duke William of Normandy.

The history of the Anglo-Saxon period is complicated and bloodthirsty and the reader follows all the twists and turns through the eyes and experiences of Magnus who acts as his father's go-between, reporting the treacheries of his Uncle Tostig, Earl of Northumbria. Magnus undertakes long journeys, becomes embroiled in family feuds, takes part in battles and gradually learns the full extent of his father's ruthlessness and ambition.

This fast-paced historical adventure presents a compelling portrayal of the story behind the Battle of Hastings. There is a great deal of historical detail to take in but it is interspersed with action and intrigue and Magnus, who did exist, develops as a character and a warrior. There are quotes from Old Norse and Old English epics to add authenticity and Sam Hart's illustrations include maps, symbols, weapons and full page dramatic scenes. This insight into the history of the period should be very useful in KS2 classrooms and there is enough entertaining story to keep interested 9+ readers engaged. **SR**

Tilly and the Time Machine

★★★★

Adrian Edmondson, illus. Danny Noble, Penguin, 223pp, 978-0-1413-7245-7, £6.99 pbk

Adrian Edmondson's debut is a heartening drama and describes the adventures of Tilly and her father, a crack-pot scientist.

After the sad loss of her mummy, Tilly lives with her dad on a deserted street in a small house. Her dad is rather unconventional; he encourages Tilly to save time by leaping out of windows instead of taking the stairs, for example. He is also very clever, and builds a working time machine in the garden shed!

Unfortunately, the time machine is somewhat flawed, and very soon Tilly's dad is missing, somewhere in history. Tilly is forced to confront the contraption and to take a trip through time to try and find him. This results

in encounters with a famous admiral, a grieving queen and a hapless German goalkeeper – and Tilly is able to help all of them. Meanwhile, in the present, Her Majesty's Government are taking a keen interest in Tilly's dad's machine, and the last thing Tilly needs is strange men knocking at her door asking to see her missing father.

Readers will stick with Tilly till the very end (or the beginning, depending on whether she can get the time machine working). Her naïve optimism and positivity are very charming and she is always willing to make time for others, even when her own situation is dire. Edmondson handles moments of loss and grief sensitively, inviting readers to share Tilly's feelings and reminding them of the importance of remembering loved ones.

The story also has some funny moments, and the humorous tone is well-accompanied by Danny Noble's delightfully unsophisticated line drawings. For many young readers, the real draw of this book will be the opportunity to read more about famous characters from history. However, though Tilly's adventures through time are good fun, they are rather short-lived, and history lovers will feel slightly under-satisfied by the brief nature of Tilly's meetings with famous faces from the past.

It is the relationship between Tilly and her enigmatic father that provides the most enjoyable moments in this book and readers will be interested to hear if Tilly's dad has any other inventions in the shed that might lead to more adventures. **SD**

Running on the Roof of the World

★★★★★

Jess Butterworth, Orion, 277pp, 9781510102088, pbk

"There are two words that are banned in Tibet. Two words that can get you locked in prison without a second thought. I watch the soldiers tramping away and call the words after them. 'Dalai Lama.'"

And so the adventure begins, immediately opening our eyes as we realise that this is here and now for people in our world. Tash lives in Tibet with her family, she attends school, she likes running, sliding down slopes, she has a best friend, Sam. So far pretty normal but straight away those short chapters pack a punch as everything changes and we discover it's an offence to run and their walk/run home from school isn't free. It has soldiers patrolling who can take you away for doing just that. As the chapters develop there are key points in all, clues are in the chapter titles so that the read is very quick and pacy. Tash and her friend Sam witness a man who sets himself on fire. The pertinent page Facts about Tibet is where we learn that 140 people have undertaken this act in Tibet since

2009 in desperation. This act sets off a lock down of the village with curfews tightened. Soldiers raid the village and remove people from their homes. Tash's Mum and Dad ensure Tash can make an escape, want her to go and find the Dalai Lama in India and seek safety. Tash and Sam then set off on a dangerous journey for freedom. **SG**

Wave me Goodbye

★★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, illus Nick Sharratt, 452pp, 978-0-8575-3515-3, £12.99 hbk

It is September 1939. Shirley Louise Smith, aged ten, is evacuated from London to an unidentified small town in the safer countryside. Her mother is a housewife and her father has just left his job as a travelling salesman to enlist in the army. In London Shirley has attended Paradise Road School. But when her mother puts her on the train Mrs Smith decides the Paradise Road kids are not good enough. She seats Shirley with the posher girls from St Agatha's Convent. But Shirley, not quite up to the required standard, is left at the evacuation centre with two boys Kevin and Archie: these are the ones nobody wants. Eventually she is billeted with two old ladies, Mrs Waverley and her housekeeper Miss Chubb. Her new home, the Red House, is mysterious and sparsely furnished. What secrets do the residents of the Red House conceal, and what effect will those secrets have on them all?

One of the problems with being Jacqueline Wilson is that her readers expect perfection from her every time they open a new book. There are one or two very minor defects in this book which it is as well to mention. For example she uses the term 'plastic'. This reviewer believes that term came into use after the war. In 1939 she probably should have used 'bakelite' and explained it. For books such as *Katy*, Wilson has clearly conducted a serious amount of research into the lives of disabled people. That research lives comfortably in the fabric of the book. In this case a similar degree of research has probably been undertaken into the experiences of evacuees but it lies more visibly on the surface of the text.

On the train Shirley meets a girl named Jessica Lipman, the daughter of a famous Hollywood film star. The two girls immediately hit it off because they are both keen readers. They are parted on arrival, Shirley sent off with the other girls from the posh school. But Jessica is in any case expelled from St Agatha's for penning an immoral story. To this reviewer, this episode has a melodramatic ring.

Wilson has a gift for striking truths. One of the evacuees has a problem with bed-wetting. Unusually perhaps it is an older boy. Wilson handles this tricky issue with consummate skill, which might be a great comfort to any reader facing the same problem.

Despite the minor flaws this book

is a worthy addition to Wilson's ever-growing body of work. **RB**

Just call me Spaghetti-Hoop Boy

★★★★

Lara Williamson, Usborne, 322pp, 978-1-4749-2130-5, £6.99 pbk

Adam is adopted, he has always known it and as much as he loves his family there is always a thought about his birth mother lurking in his mind. When his class are asked to work on their family tree Adam decides that this is the time to find his birth mother. This is the time not least because he suspects that his mother is expecting another baby and they are going rehouse him to make room for it.

Adam has a wonderful friend Tiny Eric, who tries to make Adam as happy as possible drawing him as a superhero, Adam's favourite thing, and helps Adam look for his birth mother too. All is not well in Tiny Eric's life but Adam fails to see this until it is too late.

This is a thoughtful story, its seriousness and sadness disguised by its title and cover illustrations. Its themes of family break up, adoption and what love is are neatly handled and for those readers able to pick up on the clues in the text, clues that Adam fails to pick up, giving an added frisson of impending doom. The ending is happy and yet not all the strings are neatly tied up in a fairytale manner. A thoughtful read about families for those who are ready to move on from Jacqueline Wilson. **CD**

Where the World Ends

★★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, Usborne, 978-1-4749-2114-5, 332p, £9.99 hbk

We have been to Antarctica, the central plains of Asia, the middle of Australia – now Geraldine McCaughrean takes us to one of the harshest – but beautiful – landscapes – the islands of St Kilda on the edge of the Outer Hebrides. We join Quilliam and a group of boys – all younger than him – with three adults as they set off for the Warrior Stac. They are going on the annual cull of the seabirds who roost there every summer and whose feathers, oil and flesh are vital for the islanders. They will be there, marooned, for a couple of weeks. But what happens when no boat comes to collect them? And why? McCaughrean bases her story on a real incident that took place in 1782. But she is not just writing history. She takes the bones of the event and then asks 'what if' and 'what would it be like'. It is not an easy story but it is completely absorbing. Her characters are not boys from the 21st century transported to the past; they are from their own period, their own culture – and their attitudes, reactions and beliefs stem from that. Nor is it a cosy Robinsonade. McCaughrean excels as always in her creation of the landscape. Her prose is as hard and as uncompromising as the granite rock of the Stac jutting out of

the wild Atlantic. Her descriptions are concise and arresting. McCaughrean is always worth reading and this is no exception. This is a book to recommend to young readers who want a challenge. **FH**

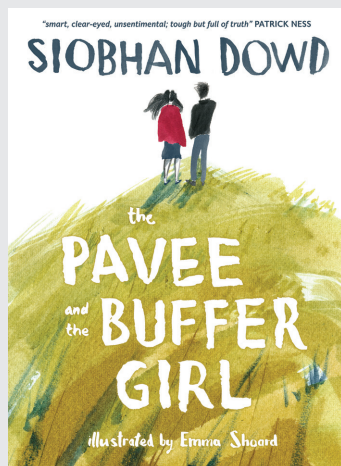
The Pavee and the Buffer Girl

★★★★★

Siobhan Dowd, illus Emma Shoard, Barrington Stoke, 112pp, 978-1-9113-7004-8, £12.99pbk

Siobhan Dowd first wrote this story for an anthology on racism. Reissued now as a graphic novel with expressive illustrations by Emma Shoard the story has lost none of its power to move readers; the spare text is as powerful and direct as when first written, while the story feels unsettlingly current.

Young Jim Curran is a Traveller, a Pavee in his own language. He and his family have recently arrived in an Irish seaside town and are immediately met with suspicion and hostility. The town's young people share their parents' attitudes and Jim and his cousins are labelled 'dirty Gyps', 'tinker-stinkers', the name-calling soon turning to physical attacks. Not all the Buffers (non-Travellers) are cruel: there's a kind man in the chip shop, once a Pavee himself, the school librarian looks out for Jim, and then there's Kit, a girl in Jim's class



who is almost as much an outsider as he is. Jim and Kit become secret friends, meeting in a cave in the cliffs, sharing more than one 'short kiss in the dark under the dripping stalactites'. Their relationship is beautifully depicted, a real tenderness between the boy and the girl he thinks of as his skylark.

Meanwhile the hostility of the rest of the community continues, culminating in two shocking incidents: Jim's little cousin Declan is so badly bullied he ends up in hospital, and the local police raid the Travellers'

camp, smashing their possessions and threatening more harassment. The family decide to leave, not just the town, but Ireland itself. Jim has to say goodbye to Kit though for this reader anyway, there's a feeling that one day he might return.

Siobhan Dowd worked for the rights of Travellers and her book gives real insight into their lives, not just the prejudice they endure, but the warmth and closeness of their communities. At a time when hostility to those regarded as 'other' or outsiders seems almost entrenched in society, this powerful, beautifully told story seems ever more important. **MMA**

See You in the Cosmos, Carl Sagan

★★★★★

Jack Cheng, Puffin, 314 pp, 978-0-1413-6560-2, £6.99 pbk

This story is told in the voice of eleven-year-old Alex, whose particular hero is the late, popularising astronomer of the title. It consists of a series of audio recordings he makes for the benefit of life forms out there in the cosmos. Alex's intention is to put all these on to a Golden iPod which he will then launch via a home-made rocket. And if this sounds like a tall order, it is, with his final attempt to send his iPod into space a dismal failure. But on the other hand, he has now managed to get miles away from his catatonic mother, with who

he lives miserably alone after the death of an absentee father. He is also currently looked after by the new adult friends he has made on his journey to the rocket site set aside for amateur enthusiasts of space travel from America and beyond.

How Alex manages all this is made believable because of his infectious powers of ingenuous charm. Those who take up with him never seem to realise they are running a considerable risk, given that any new adult relationship with an eleven-year-old child travelling without permission away from home could raise considerable suspicion. But as a juvenile character Alex dates back to a previous fictional world where the potential kindness of strangers always outweighs more contemporary suspicions about motives and behaviour. He also eventually tracks down a neglectful older brother plus a previously unknown half-sister, so to an extent keeping his new itinerant life more safely within family bounds. A final return home goes well enough, although his mother remains mentally ill for the foreseeable future.

Jack Cheng tells his story artfully enough, veering away from sentimentality though often only at the last minute. Funny, moving and sharp-witted, there is much to enjoy here for readers of the same age as Alex and indeed older. **NT**

14+ Secondary/Adult

Release

★★★★★

Patrick Ness, Walker, 288pp, 978-1-4063-3117-2, £12.99, hbk

Another remarkable novel from Patrick Ness. This time, he takes inspiration from, and pays tribute to, the unlikely coupling of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Judy Blume's *Forever*. So it's a day in the life of Adam Thorn, a day of changes in which he comes to a different understanding of the relationships in his life. The name is significant. For this gay son of an evangelical preacher in a Washington State suburb might as well be the first man on earth as he struggles to make sense of his emotional and sexual life. And Thorn? Well, that's the painful hook on the stem of the red rose of romance, and there is blood drawn, both metaphorical and literal, in this momentous day. In part, this is a tale which addresses the clash of conservative and liberal social attitudes which is everywhere around us. But like Ness's previous novels, conflict is deeply embedded in his characters' lives and relationships, so that any attempt to reduce the novel to that kind of agenda is foolish. You might say, too, that more than any other novel for young adults that I have read, this is about the

physical side of gay sex - so some of the *Forever* inspiration. But that too would be too simple. Ness is so good at conveying the waves of feeling, physical and emotional, now merged, now separate, in any relationship, that this is about how any of us have loved, both in and out of bed. I am not sure if we really need the story that runs alongside Adam's day, about the restless spirit of a girl murdered in a drug induced rage. But that too grips in its own way and Ness brings both strands to a kind of mutual conclusion, unlikely though that seems for much of the novel. You really need to read it. **CB**

The State of Grace

★★★★★

Rachael Lucas, Macmillan, 272pp, 978-1-5098-3955-1, £6.99, pbk

Grace is a girl of fifteen who is autistic. (Note: do not say who has autism.) She lives with her mother, father and younger sister Leah. Her father is a TV nature cameraman and is away on location much of the time. Grace believes there is a manual on how to be human. Everyone except Grace got a copy.

Unlike many autistic characters in books and films, Grace does not have a special talent. She is not a

mathematical genius. What she does have is a horse named Mabel, whom she absolutely adores. It is easier for Grace to communicate with Mabel than with people. Grace meets a boy named Gabriel or Gabe. At this point two unforeseen strokes of chance - one involving Mabel herself - disrupt the whole situation. The remainder of the narrative deals with Grace's attempts to cope with these events.

Grace has worked hard to develop her understanding of the communications protocol employed by people who are not autistic, the subtexts that others pick up effortlessly. Nevertheless some conversational complexities still elude her. Lucas's representation of Grace is deft, accomplished and memorable. This achievement is all the more impressive when the reader learns that Lucas herself and her daughter are both autistic. This reviewer was reminded of Lois Keith's *A Different Life*, the story of a girl who becomes a wheelchair user written by an author who is herself a wheelchair user. The publishing house of Macmillan also deserves credit for seeing that this is far from being a minority interest book.

There is one aspect of the book less satisfactory. At the end of the text when the narrative is done there

appears a list of Grace's Ten Things, the ten misconceptions about autism she would like to defuse. At the end of a book which emphasises with stunning effect that Grace, like everyone else who is autistic, is a member of the human race, she erects ten barriers between her and everyone else. The narrative carries itself with power and precision, without this didactic coda. **RB**

The Girl In Between

★★★★★

Sarah Carroll, Simon & Schuster, 228pp, 978-1-4711-6062-2, £6.99 pbk

A girl and her ma seek shelter in an old, abandoned mill to escape a life of homelessness and danger on the streets of Dublin, constantly pursued by the yellow-jacketed 'Authorities' feared by ma. To the girl, the dilapidated mill is both castle and sanctuary and the memories and ghosts it contains do not frighten her. All that matters to the girl is that her ma always comes back from begging on the streets. But as ma's drinking and drug-taking spiral out of control and the Authorities draw nearer, the girl has to retrieve deep memories and, with the help of the mysterious Caretaker, work out who the ghosts really are.

reviews

14+Secondary/Adult continued

This powerful story of homelessness, grief, abuse and isolation is told in the colloquial voice of a naive young girl. The narrative jumps backwards and forwards, with times and locations marked by her ma's frequent lapses into addiction. An atmosphere of fear and tension builds throughout, together with a feeling that something is very wrong, that is only explained by the supernatural twist at the end of the story. Whilst there are elements of confusion and repetition, this is, on the whole, a skilful and moving first novel with an effectively unsettling feel and a deliberately ambiguous ending. The author succeeds in combining the harsh realities of life on the streets within a story that reads like a bleak, modern fairy tale with archetypal characters, girl, ma, Caretaker, Authorities, and its own perilous castle. This intriguing, emotional YA title with its important themes should appeal to those older readers who appreciate social realism, mystery and a hint of the supernatural. **SR**

Out of Heart

★★★

Irfan Master, Hot Key Books, 272pp, 978-1-4714-0507-5, £6.99, pbk

This is an ambitious novel which begins and ends with poems by William Blake, *Little Boy Lost* and *Little Boy Found*, and moves restlessly around the meanings that we give to the heart. Adam's grandfather has just died, and his father left the family some time ago. Adam lives with his mum, his younger sister, Farah, who speaks only in sign language, and his grandmother. We meet him as a rather withdrawn, self-contained young man, drawing and playing with words, his favourite occupations, in a small attic room of his house, and thinking of Icarus. When he goes to help the other men of the family to wash his Dadda's body before burial, he learns that his grandfather's heart has been used as an organ donation. Not long after, a tall, pale man in ill-fitting charity shop clothes arrives at the Shahs' door, and announces, 'I have a heart in my chest that belongs to you. To your family. To Mr. Abdul-Aziz Shah.' And so William Tide becomes a part of the Shah family, much to the consternation of the neighbours. In what follows, somehow stemming from his grandfather's deathbed gift, we see Adam and the other members of his family gradually emerging from the shadow of the hurt, grief and shame which we learn has been inflicted by his absent abusive father.

There is a great deal to admire in this novel, not least its ambition, and some memorable writing. I found the body washing and Adam's dream of being the surgeon carrying out the heart transplant particularly powerful. However, I was left with a feeling of an even better novel struggling to emerge.

There is perhaps too much happening, too many good ideas; so that we don't stay long enough in one place to explore the situation or the characters' response to it. This is particularly noticeable in regard to William's acceptance into the family, which is a brilliant notion and has the potential for a lot more exploration. **CB**

Birdy Flynn

★★★★

Helen Donohoe, *Rock the Boat*, 372pp, 978-1-7807-4939-6, pbk

Berenice Flynn, known as Birdy, is aged 12 in 1982. She lives in a working class English milieu with an Irish Catholic mother and a Protestant Liverpoolian father. She has two older siblings, Eileen and Noel. This is a family with a mass of secrets, most of which will be explored in revelatory mode throughout Donohoe's book. As Birdy narrates her story, we learn that she is uncertain about her sexuality and suspects she may be transgender, though that term is never used in the text. Her introduction to sexuality is both confused and painful.

Birdy's story is also confused. Her reactions to events are mixed. Some aspects of her character revealed by the action are frankly unattractive and sometimes unexplained. Moreover an abundance of serious issues fly around the book, including sexual abuse, low educational attainment and the political questions surrounding Irish independence. For all these reasons reading this novel becomes a testing experience, one which some readers may decide to be too demanding.

These difficulties mean that an otherwise excellent book finds it hard to command the respect it deserves. **RB**

The Hate U Give

★★★★★

Angie Thomas, Walker, 432pp, 9781 406375114, £7.99 pbk

Sixteen-year-old Starr lives in Garden Heights, a poor and potentially lawless American urban ghetto although she hates anyone calling it that. She goes to school in respectable neighbouring Williamson, where she is one of only two black pupils. This proves a hard balancing act, given that she feels she must talk and even dance in quite different modes whichever community she is in at that moment. But when she and old friend Khalil are stopped in their car one night by a trigger-happy policeman who then shoots the boy dead without any real provocation, Starr has finally to decide where her loyalties lie.

This novel is written with a real sense of informed urgency. Never mind that it is too long and sometimes repetitive. Thomas's account of what it is actually like to fear any encounter however trivial with the local police force is unforgettable. She also vividly describes the experience of going to a party where gun shots break out and

what it is like to live in an area with dope sellers on every street corner. Her own family remains warm and supportive while other adolescents her own age fare badly at home. Everyone knows who the local drugs baron is, but no-one dares take him on as he spreads corruption among teenagers looking for ways of earning spare cash.

This novel was inspired by America's **Black Lives Matter** movement. With publication in 14 different countries and a filmed version on the way it deserves to make a major impact in its own right. Its tragic story is made bearable by the love that keeps Starr's family going and her own lively teenage reactions to what is going on around her. Her touching relationship with her white boyfriend throughout also carries its own message of hope. Written in a dialect that is never difficult to follow, it is as powerful an argument for mutual understanding and compassion between those urban dwellers of varying colours and incomes as it is possible to imagine. **NT**

Every Hidden Thing

★★★★★

Kenneth Oppel, David Fickling Books, 368pp, 9781443410298, £10.99 hbk

Dinosaur skeletons! Hostile American Indians! Teenage orphans, one girl, one boy! Young love! Double dealing! Near death! This novel has them all in this latest offering from a master-story teller who writes so fluently that events on the page flow by as if in a film. Things are initially tough for 17 year-old Rachel, accompanying her bossy and arrogant father in search of bigger and better fossils. But then she meets Samuel, whose own father also has the same aim in mind and in his own childish and boastful way is just as bad a parent. Both adults end up brawling with each other while their children look on helplessly before falling heavily in love. But they also have to pretend to be spying on each other's camps in order not to get sent back to their separate homes.

Set in the end of the nineteenth century in the still untamed 'badlands' of the American West, this story educates as well as entertains. Meticulously researched details of what to look out for when prospecting for dinosaur remains are made compellingly interesting. The events described are partly based on real historical happenings during the so-called 'bone wars' where two American rival collectors, living at the same time as characters in this novel, endlessly plotted against each other while discovering over a hundred new dinosaur species. Rachel and Samuel are fictional but come over just as real. Kenneth Oppel never disappoints, and this cleverly constructed novel, bearing with it a real sense of the past, very much warts and all, must surely be one of his best. **NT**

I Have No Secrets

★★★★★

Penny Joelson, *Electric Monkey*, 336pp, 978-1-4052-8615-2, £7.99 pbk

Jemma Shaw is a British girl aged 14. She has cerebral palsy affecting all four limbs and her speech. Jemma is devoid of communication capability. She cannot speak and her hands are too seriously affected to use sign language. So she exists incommunicado.

Jemma is a fulltime user of a manual wheelchair. The condition of her arms makes it necessary for Jemma to have someone pushing her chair. Controlling it herself is beyond her. Jemma has lived with her foster parents since the age of two, along with Finn (aged six and autistic) and nine year old Olivia. Olivia displays extremely challenging behaviour. She is now on her sixth foster home.

Jemma was born a twin and yearns to meet her non-disabled sister.

Jemma also has a fulltime resident carer named Sarah. Jemma adores Sarah. Sarah treats Jemma in ways that suit her age. Sarah has a boyfriend named Dan. Everyone likes Dan – everyone except Jemma.

Just before the story begins, a boy from the neighbourhood named Ryan Blake has been murdered. The killer has not been caught. How will this nexus of individuals be explored? What is Jemma's role as the narrative unfolds?

Joelson takes a worthy place alongside Sharon M. Draper in giving a presence on stage to disabled young people. Her depiction of disability is for the most part convincing. She describes Jemma's speechless frustration in a realistic manner. And the daily details of a disabled person's life are accurately reported. Research has been done.

There are however some issues. Her foster parents of course know that Jemma cannot speak or use hand signals. Yet their complete inability to understand anything about her baffles this reviewer, whose experience with aphasic children suggests there is always much available to be learned about their thoughts and feelings. Body language can be powerfully expressive. To make a more practical point, Jemma's solitary carer Sarah seems to cope with all Jemma's needs without much support, taking few days off. In the real world fulltime carers need backup.

Now to a more fundamental point. Are there certain things that should not be said in a book for young readers? At one point Dan murmurs to Jemma that in her situation he would take his own life. He volunteers to help arrange her suicide. This episode hovers on the edge of the impermissible. It is a courageous narrative stroke. But it might give young readers the dangerous notion that disabled people's lives are seen as valueless when their experience does not equip them to contest the idea. **RB**

Classics in Short No.123 Brian Alderson

A child's introduction to **The Pilgrim's Progress**.

...so I awoke, and behold it was a Dream', and that's a customary cop-out, Master Bunyan. It is unlikely that you ever came across such a thing as the fourteenth century French spiritual romance by Guillaume de Guileville *Le Pèlerinage de l'Homme*, which has some parallels to your great book, and also sets out its enormous text in guise of a dream. That derived from the earlier *Romance of the Rose* and bespeaks 'dream' as the heart of literary fantasy so that long after Christian wended his way to the Celestial City it is in a dream that Alice Liddell finds herself in Wonderland or Kay Harker battling the wicked Abner Brown in **The Box of Delights**.

No claim could be made

for Bunyan to have conceived his adventure as a theological tract for children but many testimonies to its appeal to them can rest upon the state of storytelling at the time of its publication. In 1678 the concept of books directed at and published for a child readership was just emerging and that thanks largely to the Calvinist desire to save their souls from Hell. Such things were tough going however (**A Token for Children**, a bestseller, which lasted into Victorian times, dealt with 'the holy lives and joyful deaths' of small children) and it is not difficult to believe that an adventure fantasy, however begirt with homiletics, might make an attractive alternative, especially at a time when the craft of the novel was yet to be fashioned.

A glimpse of evidence

for child use may be had from the publication in 1825 of Isaac Taylor's **Bunyan Explained to a Child**. The Rev'd Taylor was himself a dissenting minister and he acknowledges that Bunyan's book 'takes great hold of children long before they can enter into its spiritual meaning' and in fifty-one short sections he takes them through the episodes of the story, glossing what he takes to be Bunyan's spiritual reading of the events and adding in each instance a little hymn of his own composition to reinforce the message. (Contrarily, these are no easier for the reader to follow than Bunyan's prose and they lack its rugged force.)

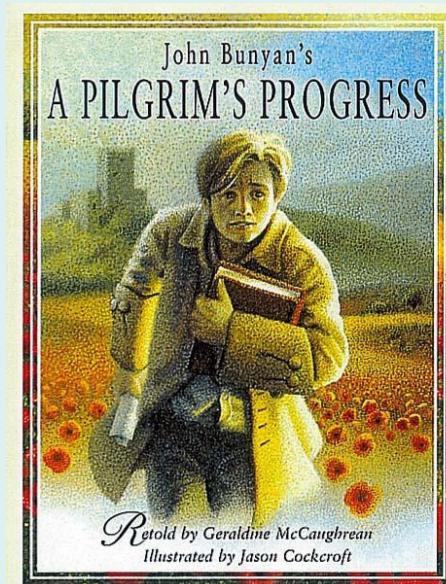
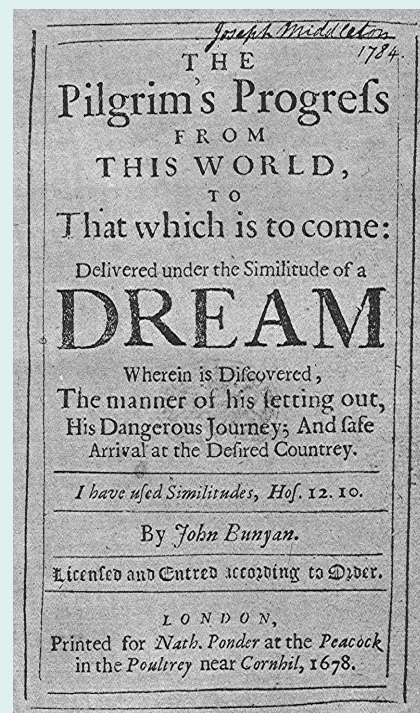
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although the procedure can't help but coarsen both the argument and the rhetoric of the original, it does systematically recapitulate each incident

and allows the child more easily to see the disparate incidents of the plot. For the reverend author was an artist and engraver as well as minister (father too of the famous Ann and Jane Taylor whose **Original Poems for Infant Minds** was popular for a hundred years) and each of his fifty-one numbered sections is illustrated with a vignette picturing the action, with a pictorial route-map at the start. (An elaborate fold-out road-map had figured as frontispiece to an edition of 1775.) Thus Taylor graphically sums up the narrative appeal of the story's function as an adventure along with the fantasy of the topography and the dangers that Pilgrim encounters: the Slough of Despond, say, or the Valley of the Shadow Death, or Vanity Fair and Doubting Castle. It cannot be expected that much of the allegory of the names and situations are explained (Messrs.Pickthank and By-Ends, the Lions at the House Beautiful) nor yet the influence drawn from Bunyan's reading of, on the one hand, the chapbooks on whose possession in his youth he castigated himself (Giant Despair), nor yet the Bible (Apollyon)..

Taylor's generous procession of images

may also offer a ground for speculating on the long-term 'gratification' which he saw the **Progress** as offering children. While the conversational language could easily have made it a book that could be read aloud serially in families, printed copies with illustrations might also serve as a guide to those dramatic passages where events supercede doctrine or saintly reflection. Several illustrated editions were published in the eighteenth century, with the elementary metalcuts by John Sturt predominating in many cheap, often provincial, editions. None were intended for child readers (unless you count chapbooks) and the first so intended was perhaps the oddest, as well as the rarest, ever published. It came from the Holborn Hill shop of William Darton in 1823 and consists of twelve leaves, measuring 85 x 105mm.and printed on one side of the paper only. The whole story is told in 547 words which are engraved round six finely hand-coloured engravings, for it was also issued as a print. Encompassing Part I of the **Progress**, it would have been a costly purchase at a shilling a time in its pink paper wrappers and you could buy Part II and the spurious Part III in a companion volume for the same price.



Geraldine McCaughrean's retelling of Bunyan's classic was published by Hodder Children's Books in 1999, with illustrations by Jason Cockcroft. It won the Blue Peter Book Award.

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