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Features editorial 130
Ten Minutes With... Chris Riddell: Q&A 131
Barbara Band
Lightbulb Moments: Powered By Librarians 132
Barbara Band
Embedding Reading for Pleasure in the KS3 Curriculum 134
Samantha Dawkins and Joanna Whitehouse
Is Your Library Team Diverse and Inclusive? 136
Helen Swinyard
The SLA/CILIP SLG Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Award 138
Dawn Finch
Library Competitions! Are they worth the effort? 140
Susan Smith
‘The Sympathetic Mind’: Celebrating local stories 142
Charlotte Weatherley
Library Home Visitor Project: Enjoyable Routines 143
Rhiannon Cook

Websites, apps and digital resources 146

Reviews editorial 152
Under Eight 153
Eight to Twelve 164
Poetry and Plays 179
Twelve to Sixteen 180
Sixteen to Nineteen 189
Professional 191
Index of advertisers 191
Index of books reviewed 192

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Worldwide institutional subscriptions to the journal only are available at £115.00 for the calendar year 2018.
Welcome back to a new school year, I hope you’ve all had a restful summer. I always started the new term feeling fairly organised yet within a month my priorities had changed, the resolution to keep up-to-date with my emails had failed miserably, and there was at least one teacher who had changed the focus of their schemes of work and had omitted to tell me, turning up for a research lesson only for me to discover I had precisely three books on the new topic. The joys of being a school librarian – and yet this is exactly what makes the job stimulating and challenging.

I attended the joint SLA/CILIP YLG conference in Harrogate where our previous President, Kevin Crossley-Holland, handed over the reins to Chris Riddell. I am delighted that Chris is going to continue with his support and advocacy for school librarians, and I was able to catch up with him in between the long lines for book signing. The result is ‘Ten Minutes with Chris Riddell’ and I plan for this to be a regular feature where I interview various board members and try to discover ‘the person behind the name’ – watch this space!

I have also included a write-up about the conference in this issue. It was great to be able to meet some of you in person and I know that everyone who attended this event will have had an amazing time – not to mention staggering home with a huge pile of proof copies and free books. It will have been a different experience for each delegate, depending on their choices for workshops, their conversations and exchange of ideas with other librarians – I have written about my experience but I would be delighted if anyone else would like to write an article about how they have used concepts and information from the conference in their own situation. Email me via slaeditor@sla.org.uk.

September is often the time we think about new projects and plan for the year ahead. These may include collaborations between the library and other departments, a focus on library stock to assess its diversity and inclusiveness, and activities linked to both internal and external events. If you are recruiting new pupil librarians, think about whether any of your regular helpers could be selected for the Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Award, nominations are now open. And don’t forget to consider how you will collect information and evidence that show the value and impact of what you do. It is also worth reflecting on your own CPD; you may not be able to attend conference but there are many ways to keep skills and knowledge up-to-date. I hope the articles in this issue will give you a few ideas; don’t forget to have a look at some of the excellent new SLA publications too – Voice and Vision (Jake Hope), Train to Gain (Barbara Band) and A World of Books in Translation (Joy Court and Daniel Hahn) may all be beneficial depending on your focus.

Barbara Band, Features Editor

Contributions

Editorial contributions should be sent to the Features Editor: Barbara Band, 7 Woodland Walk, Aldershot, Hampshire GU12 4FE; Email: sleditor@sla.org.uk

Articles for consideration are always welcome. The Editor is happy to receive enquiries from potential contributors and will be pleased to supply information about presentation.

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There can’t be many people who are not aware that Chris Riddell has been Children’s Laureate for the past two years. During this time he has been a prolific supporter of school libraries; speaking out for them publically via his illustrative work, sending messages to his many followers on social media and even meeting with the education minister – and he is set to continue with this work. In June, Kevin Crossley-Holland handed over the Presidency of the School Library Association to Chris and I was delighted to be able to catch up with him at conference in Harrogate.

Q After a rather manic two years as Children’s Laureate, did you not want to take some “time out” before jumping into another high profile role?

A “I love the process of illustrating, drawing in different contexts so the past two years have never felt busy or stressful. Drawing is part of my everyday life. Being Children’s Laureate was a fantastic opportunity for me to work in lots of different areas and now, becoming the SLA President, gives me a chance to take what I enjoyed doing most about the role – advocacy for libraries – into something longer term. Supporting and visiting libraries enables me to talk to children and librarians.”

Q Watching you draw, it seems as though it’s as natural as breathing to you. Is this the case?

A “I’ve spent my career attempting to be spontaneous. I used to draw things roughly then reproduce them as a piece of fine art but it just didn’t work. The finished product wouldn’t be quite the same; something was different, not quite right, about it. So I’ve now learnt the art of “letting go” and to trust the process. To just draw – and I’ve ended up with some happy accidents.”

Q How do you see yourself developing the role of President?

A “I want to work with The School Librarian, producing artwork for it myself and also bringing in new illustrators whose work I admire. I certainly intend to continue Kevin’s role regarding advocacy, bringing my own skill set to the position by creating that visual impact. I respond to writers and their words, and I want to continue illustrating key themes that are important to libraries. I’d also like to get other illustrators to do the same.”

Q You’re always drawing people on trains, have you ever been spotted?

A “Never! And this has now become a point of honour. Once I was drawing a young woman who was engrossed in her book and just as I took the photo of my illustration with her blurred image in the background, she looked up. In the photo it appears as if she’s looking at me and lots of people online remarked that I’d been caught out but she was actually just staring off into the distance and never saw me.”

Q Are there any authors you’d like to work with?

A “Every author I meet. And I want to illustrate every book I see that has space in the margins. The book that is top of my list is Gormenghast by Mervyn Peake; that’s because I’ve now convinced the publishers to let me do the book that was top of the list which is Alice in Wonderland.”

Q What’s on your Ipod?

A “My number one stress reliever is the Bach Cello Suites – all of them. I put on my headphones and I’m transported away, I’m completely somewhere else. And I often then just get out the paper and draw.”

Q Do you have a signature dish?

A “My children may have different views on this but I think I make a rather good homemade pizza. The toppings can be a bit experimental but the secret is all in the dough.”

Q If you were to get a tattoo, what would it be?

A “It would be a discrete one but would have to be a cycling fish.”

■ We are extremely grateful to Chris Riddell for providing original artwork to feature on our front cover —Ed.
2017 marks the 80th anniversary of the School Library Association as well as the Carnegie Medal, both being established in 1937, so a perfect opportunity for a joint SLA/CILIP YLG conference. This was held in Harrogate from 23 to 25 June and, not surprisingly, was fully-booked months in advance.

The themes of the conference were manifold: self-esteem; mental health and reading; book awards and controversial books; virtual learning; and information literacy (amongst others) – certainly something to appeal to everyone – and these were covered in a range of presentations, talks and workshops. Add to this list, author talks, book signings, two evenings of entertainment, and an exhibition space full of publishers and library suppliers, not to mention the Norfolk Children's Book Centre, and you can understand why delegates went home rather tired but with their heads bursting with ideas and inspiration. Anyone who has ever attended a library conference will know that once you get sucked in, you tend not to step outside the venue until the last session, blinking in the daylight and laden down with proof copies, catalogues, bookmarks and other freebies, your voice hoarse from constantly talking about books and libraries!

The conference opened with an emotional talk from Amnesty International and Chickenshed Theatre, detailing their ‘Dreams of Freedom’ project and showing a video of three delightful boys who had been adopted by a gay couple; there were not many dry eyes left in the room after that. The first day finished with a Harry Potter themed dinner – dressing up optional – complete with quiz and guest speaker, Laura Dockrill; always amusing and entertaining.

In addition to the main programme, there were four sessions throughout the day on Saturday, each session with four options – difficult choices had to be made. Sunday saw both the SLA and YLG AGMs, more talks and a closing presentation from Natasha Deven, part of the Self Esteem Team, speaking about ‘Young People's Mental Health and Reading’ – such an important topic considering the worrying increase in YA mental illnesses.

My highlights

Everyone who attended will have experienced a slightly different weekend depending on their choices and priorities, and it is not possible to cover everything – if you want to read more some of the presentations can be found on the SLA website www.sla.org.uk/weekend-course-2017.php – but my highlights were:

- Illuminating inclusion – how to ensure you are engaging and inspiring a diverse audience: this was a panel discussion led by Jake Hope, a judge/consultant on the Frances Lincoln Diverse Voices Award http://sla.org.uk/blg-frances-lincoln-diverse-voices-award.php
Supporting ‘early readers’ of all ages – delivered by Louise Johns-Shepherd and Charlotte Harding, both from the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) https://www.clpe.org.uk/ – a very relevant session for all working in school libraries, regardless of the age group, and a heads-up for some excellent resources on the website.

The Reading Outcomes Framework – this session looked at the toolkit that has been developed by The Reading Agency, which allows you to understand, demonstrate and improve the impact of library activities. It is a comprehensive tool that is best explored online; free and available on the TRA website www.readingoutcomesframework.org.uk.

The beginning of a new school year is a good opportunity to think about how we are going to show the value and benefits of the work we do within our libraries. Quantitative evidence is easy to collect, it is the qualitative evidence that is harder to ascertain and tends to be mostly anecdotes and impressions. This tool allows you to provide more tangible evidence, and can be used for advocacy and promotion.

Other sessions I would have liked to attend – had I been able to clone myself – were:

- Managing Change delivered by school librarian, Terri McCarger, and Elizabeth Hutchinson from Guernsey SLS (worth checking out her blog http://elizabethutch.blogspot.co.uk)
- The Stealth Librarian: engaging non-traditional library users – Amy McKay, School Librarian of the Year Award winner 2016
- Teenage Mental Health and Reading – by award-winning author, Nicola Morgan https://www.nicolamorgan.com/
- Planning for Learning: from resource management to curriculum development – Darryl Toerien, school librarian
- Arts Award in schools and public libraries – Caroline Bray, Arts Award Associate, and Annabel Thomas, Arts Programmes.

As I said, something for everyone and difficult choices! And I haven’t even mentioned the numerous authors and illustrators including out-going SLA President, Kevin Crossley-Holland, David Almond, new Children’s Laureate, Lauren Child, and our new President, Chris Riddell. Many thanks to the conference organisers for putting together such an inspiring programme and also for their unstinting work during the weekend.

We work in a profession where there is always something new to learn and it is important for both ourselves and our students to keep our skills and knowledge up-to-date. Regardless of the stage you are at in your library career, whether a new or experienced professional, the conference is a wonderful opportunity for CPD, networking and for gaining that knowledge. It is also excellent value for money, the cost being the same as many one day courses – I came home with books that were probably worth what I paid for my course fee!

Planning for the 2018 conference is already underway. This is being held in Glasgow from Friday 22 to Sunday 24 June. Put the dates in your diary and start a conversation with your line manager now about how valuable it would be for you to attend – not to mention benefitting your library, students and school – I would 100% recommend it.

Barbara Band is a School Library, Reading and Literacy Consultant (www.barbaraband.com).

Weekend Course 2018

The next SLA weekend course – Creativity and Imagination: Changing Children’s Lives – will be held in a three-day format on 22–24 June 2018 at the Grand Central Hotel in Glasgow.

Barbara Band is a School Library, Reading and Literacy Consultant (www.barbaraband.com).
It all began over a coffee and a chat back in 2015. Could we bring the great ideas from Reading for Pleasure into the curriculum at KS3, and convince a bunch of early teenagers that reading was the secret joy they were all seeking? Or should we instead plan the more achievable Machu Picchu hike? There was a lot to consider.

Seriously though, we all know that in international schools the key to enabling students to access the materials necessary for success at KS4 and KS5 is a certain standard of functional literacy. The question is how do we, as educationalists, help them get there? Joanna had attended a PD with a keynote speech on Reading for Pleasure delivered by Nicola Morgan and returned keen to bring these ideas into the English Department.

The central point of Reading for Pleasure is to get students wanting to read in their own time. It is, therefore, important not only that they have a completely free choice of reading material, but also to communicate with them that they don’t have to finish a book they are not enjoying. Nicola Morgan’s excellent additional point was that reading, if enjoyable and absorbing, can become a form of relaxation that is as essential to wellbeing as sleep, food and exercise. I guess the real key was how to get to a place where they wanted to read and didn’t have to be dragged kicking and screaming into the library. We sat down and began to plan...

Our focus was twofold, from both an English Curriculum and a library point of view. We wanted to increase levels of functional literacy in English, increase exposure to English in written form and at the same time develop student relationships with the library, boost borrowing levels at KS3 and increase the productive usage of the library space. All this but, most importantly, to instil a love of reading in students and a reading culture throughout the school community.

We did this by moving away from a culture of the teacher handing over to the librarian and towards a co-delivering dynamic in the classroom.

Firstly we foregrounded the reading as part of the curriculum. The first lesson every week was a reading lesson where the librarian came into the classroom and then took small groups of students to the library to choose books. All homework was based around reading and developing a response to the book. This began with book reviews and then expanded to storyboards (to develop sequencing and sentence skills), book trailers and finally book conferences where students discussed author techniques.

As a teacher, I was keen to measure skills acquisition, the effectiveness of my teaching and the impact of reading on the students’ acquisition of skills. It was decided to focus on Year 7 and 8, and benchmark using Cambridge checkpoint exams (Language and Literacy paper). Answers were then analysed and a skills breakdown by student and class was produced. This was incredibly illuminating and revealed a range of issues from basic punctuation errors, sentence structure and lack of vocabulary. What was also clear was that students lacked a core understanding of how and why authors write. They seemed to have difficulty understanding the aim and purpose; which is to engage and entertain!

Analysis of data

It was then decided to continue with benchmarking, and we then analysed the results one year and 15 months later. We were genuinely surprised to see such a difference. The results, as seen in graph 1, showed real development in key skills and awareness of the techniques authors use to engage readers.
The most significant improvements were in grammar, sentence skills and error correction. This group is now significantly more confident as Year 8 students, and have applied these new skills to great effect in other subjects such as science and geography.

Looking at library circulation statistics we were able to identify the number of books borrowed each academic year by KS3 students. Graph 2 shows four academic years’ worth of borrowing figures, which increase year on year, but modestly until the final year 2015/16. This is the year in which we started the reading programme, and the number of books borrowed at KS3 almost double. This can be, in part, explained by the increase in suitable books for that age range available in the library, however, the reading programme undoubtedly helped foster stronger relationships between KS3 students and the library and, therefore, can be seen as a significant factor in the huge jump in borrowing figures.

**Why did it work?**

As a teacher I focused on:

- Prioritising reading and giving it as weekly homework
- Having reading as part of the target setting process
- Using Assessment for Learning and target setting interviews with students so they could see the impact reading had on their literacy levels
- Ensuring parents could see the benefit of the programme; reading was discussed during parents’ evening interviews and highlighted in school reports
- Showing book trailers in class
- Talking about books we have read/are reading.

From a librarian’s point of view what worked was:

- Being in the classroom rather than having students ‘dropped off’ at the library
- Having equal status in the classroom – with different skill sets recognised
- Walking with students to and from the library from the classroom facilitated informal discussions on books
- Students making suggestions of new book stock meant that there were more books that students actually wanted to read
- Having support from Head of School and Head of English with the library budget
- Displays of student book reviews inside and outside of the library meant that the whole school community could engage with the reading focus that the programme created.

**Thoughts for the future**

Our hope for the future is to build on the initial success of the project and continue to encourage reading at this level. We aim to foster continuing links with our partner school in Manchester with ideas such as Biblionasium and book review postcard exchanges. The school website is being relaunched and it is hoped that we can create inspiring resources to support reading and inform parents, such as suggested reading lists and online materials.

Other ideas via the website include streaming podcasts and audiobooks to further encourage listening skills and immersion English. We are also actively working with other departments and teachers to further expand this programme across the school.

- Samantha Dawkins is Teacher KS3 English, Social Science and Joanna Whitehouse is Librarian at Lanna International School Thailand (British Curriculum, Ages 3-18).

*This article first appeared in the Spring 2017 edition of the ‘EARCOS Triannual Journal’
Is Your Library Team Diverse and Inclusive?

Supporting Different Students as Pupil Librarians

by Helen Swinyard

To give a little context, I have worked for the last six years at Heartlands High School – a mixed comprehensive (11-16 years) that opened in September 2010, now with 1,071 on roll (at time of writing) which includes 29 students in the ASD provision.

Our 2016 Ofsted said ‘Pupils, irrespective of their starting points, receive a range of support’ and of the library ‘The library is at the heart of the school and is a vibrant and extremely well-used resource. Pupils are keen to borrow books, read newspapers and journals, complete homework or receive extra help with their studies.’ Our library is open and regularly used by both mainstream and ASD provision during class time and free time. We issue on average 104 books and have 400 visitors each school day.

In terms of students with extra needs in the mainstream, we have:

- 25% of the student population need exam access arrangements
- 12% of students are on the SEN register
- 6% of students have an EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan)
- 1% of students are LAC (Looked After Children).

We use the Accelerated Reader programme and Student Librarians always show a higher than expected reading age growth, both for students historically in the role and for current students.

Librarians, in their search for joining information with users, will no doubt be doing all kinds of things in their schools that I haven’t thought of. I know of many school libraries with positive discrimination in their collection management towards BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) authors, stocking reading schemes for those still on P levels or EAL (English as Additional Language), strict rules and routines, clear signage and quiet, safe spaces. In this article I would like to celebrate some of my library team, past and present, to inspire you as you start the new school year and choose student librarians. Hopefully, in these real characters (with pseudonyms), you will find some familiarity and some challenges!

Our army of student librarians are massively important to get things done and keep the library running but, primarily, I see them as there to assist me rather than me providing a service for them! So it is much easier to get volunteers who are independent, clever, creative booklovers who can just get on with things. I confess I occasionally get frustrated with some student librarians who need a bit more TLC but I’ve found over the years that it turns out to be worth the effort in the long-run.

We have two types of library jobs which students can take. The first is our official student librarians, who apply through a strict system using the fantastic SLA Pupil Librarian Toolkit. They are fully trained, wear their badges with pride, and have regular shifts on a rota. The second is any student who asks for jobs that day, for which we give out in-school volunteering rewards. These are odd jobs, like putting letters home into envelopes or cutting things out. Often ad hoc SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) helpers are the ones who progress up to official status.

Gill, with dyslexia and anxiety, came to donate lots of books from her bedroom clearout on her final day of Y11. She had been part of the library team for her whole school life and that was her way of saying ‘thank you’ rather than out loud. I was impressed with her book choices! We always check on application if students have dyslexia, and we don’t push them to complete an alphabetical shelving task during the interview process, or get them to shelve – usually that would be part of the deal, so students don’t just sit on the issue desk computer, the bit that seems to generally be their favourite. Gill has increased in confidence over the years, is great at customer service and encouraging/training younger pupils, and being on the team means she can excel at something at school, where in most academic subjects she will always be struggling.

I hope by now you are aware of the publisher Barrington Stoke, with their dyslexic friendly font and paper colour. We label ours with a star, and send a photo and list home to all students with dyslexia to alert them and their families to these excellent books. We also have a set of coloured filters behind the desk if students are in the library and have forgotten theirs.

Mohamed, with moderate autism but works well in the mainstream, was a surprise in the library application form box! He is very quiet and has a low reading ability but he is very forgetful, so he kept overlooking his shifts, even though we made sure they were the same time each week (we have a two week timetable). We didn’t enforce our normal ‘three strikes and you’re out’ rule with him, but eventually he stopped turning up at all. We put this down to having other
interests and not wanting to do the job anymore – but a few weeks ago (months and months since when we’ve hired others to take his place) I spoke to his key worker and she was very surprised he was no longer a librarian. He apparently still wears his badge and talks glowingly about being a student librarian!

Christine also has autism, is academically very good but finds some social situations a bit daunting. It has been great to see her confidence soar when she’s at the desk. The formal situation of the desk interactions are good for her as there are set questions and answers e.g. ‘how can I help you?’ ‘Would you like to borrow or return the book?’ ‘Have a nice day.’

Philip had severe autism and found mainstream school very difficult. He moved schools quite quickly. However, he thought the library was the best place in the universe. We think it was the lure of seeing other students using the computer which hooked him, and the calm atmosphere/lack of sensory inputs compared to a classroom, corridor or playground. We trained him to use the issue desk, and he was allowed to do this by his LSA as a reward for doing work. Easily distracted, he would need constant reminders by a librarian (rather than SEND staff) that he could only work in the library today if he finished his work... and he would! It seemed to be the only thing to make that happen. However we didn’t push doing any other librarian tasks and the rest of the team were accepting of this.

Mona was a Chinese EAL student, who spent a lot of time in the library studying and reading her own Chinese fiction books. She arrived with no English, which her brother seemed to pick up with ease and so made friends quicker. She would watch other librarians and eventually asked if she could help too. She turned out to be a whizz at shelving information books with Dewey, which I hardly ever ask students to do – only a few seem to really ‘get’ how the system works. That led to a massive increase in confidence and in-house rewards, chatting and making friends with the other librarians, and that led to shelving fiction alphabetically, which helped her English; eventually she was sitting at the library desk chatting away to users as if she owned the place.

Our year 10 work experience students usually come from other schools in the borough, but sometimes we host our own students who cannot be placed. I tend to be quite reticent to do this because they are not usually library lovers and we would prefer people who have chosen to help rather than being the last resort. This week is usually a quiet one to get admin done during the year 10 lessons! Also – it can be mentally exhausting sometimes. So I always see these as opportunities for the students, rather than for the library itself, unlike regular helpers. That way, any tasks completed are a bonus. We always check with SEND staff what would help them before they start, and how best to handle them.

One, Simon, with quite severe autism, was amazing on the computer and with methodical tasks that most of our student librarians find boring. So we gave up on getting him to listen to students read or running the issue desk (work experience staples) and had him make series lists with titles and AR levels – then hunt for the series and stick them into front pages. He loved it. Sadly the lighting and the noise in the library between lessons was too much for him and he only managed part of the week. Too much sensory input. So, in hindsight, a few regular hours a day would have been better. Precious was the opposite – she got distracted easily (not a great librarian trait). We gave her a notebook in which she took great delight in crossing off her daily tasks (who doesn’t love a list?) and her confidence soared from Monday to Friday, where we even gave shelving a go!

It strikes me on writing this article that the strict criteria I set for becoming a librarian might be too much for some SEND pupils – for example, they have to remember to come to an interview at a certain time. In future I think I will liaise better with my SEND department at recruitment periods, to let them know the deadlines and pass on a copy of the application form, as some students may need help filling it in. I have also been reflecting on LAC students – we are aware of those at the school, are lenient with any book losses and make sure they get ‘prizes’ (e.g. free books to keep) whenever a bookfair or author arrives. But I think in future recruitment I will make sure they get copies of the application form and encourage them to train.

Finally, be kind to yourself and others. We are all busy and wish ‘if only I had more time or money or [insert issue here]’. But have a think if you could change the life of one more student, who might not normally be on your radar. It could change them, you, the culture of the school – who knows!

Tips

- Liaise with SEND staff and check out students
- Work out which tasks suit which child – you may have to be lenient on your normal roles and rules
- Be kind to yourself and others – giving a little time is worth it, but you still need to get ‘stuff done’!
- Document everything – use it for grant forms, reports to SLT, pass to SEND staff for their own records.

Helen Swinyard MA is at Heartland High School, Haringey and is Founder of the Haringey Children’s Book Award (@HelenSwinyard @LibraryHHS helen.swinyard@heartlands.haringey.sch.uk).
September will see the launch of the 2018 Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Award (PLAA). This award, created by former CILIP President and school library consultant, Barbara Band, celebrates the extraordinary work done by pupils in our school libraries. The award process begins with nominations from school librarians all over the country; in the past we have had entries from Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales so it truly is a UK-wide event. These nominations are read carefully and discussed in much detail by a panel of expert judges drawn from school librarians, educationalists and literacy consultants who have a wide range of experience both in a variety of schools, libraries and school library services; last year the panel featured author, Sufiya Ahmed, as a guest judge and we are delighted that she is returning again this year. The long list of nominations is condensed down to an Honour List of around five names, and from that list a winner is selected.

I have been a member of the judging panel since the first award, and it quickly became one of the highlights of my year. Reading the nominations is both inspiring and humbling. All over the country remarkable young people are giving up their time to help out their school librarians. For most, being a pupil library assistant is mainly about stamping and shelving books, and day-to-day assistance in the library, but the nominations for the PLAA have demonstrated how much more these students are doing. In these nominations I have been fortunate enough to read about the brilliant work that they do, week after week, consistently and reliably, often without wider recognition within the school.

They have run book groups, created displays, produced newsletters, organised reading-based activities and spoken up on behalf of the library to other students, staff and parents. They have been mentors to vulnerable pupils, guides and ambassadors for the library, and champions of literacy and reading but, above all, they have recognised something very important. They know exactly how significant the library is, and they know the value of reading for pleasure. These young people were first drawn to their library because it was a place in the school where they felt they belonged. It was a place that fitted with who they are, welcomed them without judgement, and enabled them to grow and develop.

Victoria Langford, the 2017 Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Award winner, said when asked what winning the award has meant to her, ‘Winning the Award has already helped to make me feel so much more confident about my role, and has encouraged me to take on more responsibility within the running of the library. It has allowed me to realise that my ideas are valid and worth consideration, and so has increased my confidence to pose new ideas to help make the library even better’.

Victoria Langford, the 2017 Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Award winner, with the Panel of Judges.
Abbie Craske, winner of the inaugural PLAA, said of her school library, ‘In the beginning it was an escape from life – now it enhances my life. It has made such a difference to me, and it is a privilege to give something back to the place I love.’

Time and time again we have read in the nominations how the school library, and the librarian, changed the lives of these young people for the better. In return, they made a conscious decision to give back. They wanted to share the joy that they had found in the library and became pupil library assistants, not simply because they wanted to spend more time in the library, but because it was important to them that others had the opportunity to feel that sense of belonging and self-worth. This explains, beyond books, what good school libraries do. Yes, of course they support literacy and develop reading skills. Yes, of course they help students find information to support their education. Yes, of course they provide a study space and computer access. But school libraries are so much more than that. We hear from the pupils how the school library, and the librarian, has been there as part of a vital process of supporting their wider mental health and wellbeing. The library is the place where they are not afraid to express their love of reading and books and it is also a place where so many vulnerable or marginalised pupils have found a space to feel safe and welcomed.

This is not anecdotal evidence from teachers or librarians. Via the nomination forms for the PLAA, year after year, we hear the voices of the young people themselves. We hear how the librarian and the library have been a key factor in pupils’ developmental and social growth, as well as a large contributing factor in their success in the educational environment. This is why school libraries and librarians are so important, not just because we can measure the educational improvement of the young people who use them, but because we should never underestimate the huge importance of the things that we can’t measure.

Please consider if you have a student who you would like to nominate. All nominees are recognised and receive a certificate acknowledging their achievement; it would be wonderful if all schools celebrated the work of their pupil library assistants as much as the accomplishments of their sports, drama and music students, and this award goes some way towards that goal. Students who have been nominated previously are eligible to be entered again.

Nominations for the 2018 Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Award open in September 2017 and nomination papers will be available via the website – www.libpupilaward.co.uk. On the website you can also find information about the Honour Lists members, the winners, and about the amazing work that they do.

- Dawn Finch is the Past President of CILIP, and a children’s author and librarian (www.dawnfinch.com @dawnafinch).
In 2009, I took up a post (completely new to me) as a school librarian in a prep school. The previous librarian had left over a term ago and my first task was to extend the library into the adjacent room. Once this was achieved (thanks to the help of the Year Eight boys) and library sessions were, in theory, up and running, I naively decided to muster interest in the new library by way of a story competition. I duly told all the classes that attended the library sessions about the competition, the prize of a book for the winner and eagerly awaited the flood of entries. Yes, failure; I received one entry. Still, one was enough to award the prize.

Since that baptism of fire, I have learnt to:

- Liaise with my colleagues, finding out when the English Department is doing poetry, letter or persuasive writing which might tie up with a competition
- Have announcements made at assemblies promoting the competition and more importantly, the prizes being given out at assemblies too
- Involve the pupil librarians in making up and disseminating the promotional flyers for the competition (brilliant grapevine)
- Display supportive resources at the time of the competition such as the Usborne’s Write Your Own Adventure Stories range and Kingfisher’s Basher’s Punctuation
- Promote the ‘Writer’s Clinic’, a once a week session run by the English Department that the pupils can attend to bounce their ideas about
- Involve the pupils’ parents – one of the dads happened to be an editor, so we enlisted his help by way of a Column Writing Workshop
- Piggyback on the popularity of national competitions e.g. shadowing Chris Evans’ 500 Words and various FirstNews competitions.

So, needless to say, entries to competitions increased as my know-how improved. We have also had some successes. So far, so good, I’m thinking competitions are possibly worth the effort, until… our new headmistress asked me to enter the World Book Day competition this year.

The competition was based on a book by Oliver Jeffers and Sam Winston called *A Child of Books* and the idea was to create an imaginative display based around this book. Now, the pupil librarians will tell you that my displays lack any creativity unless said pupils take over. I would have all the display items in a table format with no artistic input whatsoever, thus I ran to the Art Department. With the help of the teachers and more importantly, the Senior Art Club, we created our display. As *A Child of Books* takes the characters through a world of typographical landscapes, the typography being text from the Classics such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *Gulliver’s Travels* and such like, I thought it would be a good idea to encourage the pupils to illustrate a favourite character or scene from a classic book and link it to a piece of text supporting that illustration.

For example, the steam train illustration in E. Nesbit’s *The Railway Children* would be linked to the text:

“...They all climbed on to the top of the fence, and then suddenly there was a rumbling sound that made them look along the line to the right, where the dark mouth of a tunnel opened itself in the face of a rocky cliff; next moment a train had rushed out of the tunnel with a shriek and a snort, and had slid noisily past them. They felt the rush of its passing, and the pebbles on the line jumped and rattled under it as it went by.”

A collection of illustrations and extracts from the Classics was amassed and displayed on the doors and boards in the library. The actual books were placed on the window ledges and any free surface. We included the abridged, picture and graphic novel versions hoping to make the Classics accessible to all. Some of these versions were Graffex, hybrid fiction/fact books with text that explained the events of that time, very interesting for your more information-inclined reader. Where there was a contemporary sequel to a classic, such as Holly Webb’s *Return to the Secret Garden* based on Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*, these were put alongside. My favourite related-to-the-Classics book was Anthony Browne’s *Willy’s Stories.*
We started off our series off sessions on the Classic genre by reading *A Child of Books*. I’m ashamed to report that the children saw more things in that book than I did. The detail and illusions are brilliant. For example, the businessman reading the Serious Stuff in the newspaper doesn’t have letters in his glasses but numbers; the typography below the children in the boat (alluding to Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*) is laid out in such a way that it reflects their body shape in the water; it’s just so clever and the pupils loved it. This generated a great interest in the reasons for just reading for pleasure and the Classics in general.

As I was in awe of the Senior Art Club going to great lengths to do the drawings, I wanted to reward these efforts by using the display to its utmost. We made up a type of quiz where you had to link the drawing to the text and, for the more able pupils, name the book and author, any other books by said author and any contemporary sequels. Needless to say I’ve not managed to do it with all the classes yet but it’s been fun; we halved the classes and made it into a team quiz. Again, I was amazed at the pupils’ enthusiasm and how much they already knew. Another tactic we employed to encourage the pupils to actually dip into some of the Classics was our version of Musical Books. We set up the chairs in the library as you would for musical chairs and placed a Classic book on each. Then with some motivating music (*Star Wars* theme) they went around the chairs and when the music stopped, they sat down and read. Repeating this so that they got a chance to read a little from as many books as possible. I was able to issue many a Classic to them by this means. The ‘Save the Story’ collection of books by the publisher, Pushkin, was superb for this game as they are large books, very attractive and make the story accessible. There is a fantastic range from Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* titled as *Captain Nemo* to Sophocles’ *Antigone*.

So, was it worth the effort? Disappointment once again, not even a mention in the runners up. I put this down to my prescriptive nature asking the pupils to draw an illustration from a Classic book; this is hardly using their own imagination. When you look at the winners’ displays on the World Book Day website, they are so inventive; lots of good ideas to be plagiarized. In my defense I would say entering the competition was not a complete failure as I:

- Liaised with the Art Department for the first time (to be repeated)
- Got to know the pupils outside the library setting (Senior Art Club) so I can pitch more appropriate books to them now; Shaun Tan’s *Singing Bones* proved most successful after the focus on Classics
- Managed to promote an interest in wonderful books

Gained know-how – if there is another competition next year I’ll open up the discussion of how we should enter it to the pupils.

So are library competitions worth the effort? From a pupil’s perspective, I think as long as the librarian and teachers acknowledge and value the completely voluntary work that the pupil puts into the process, support them, praise them, even if they don’t win, it’s worth the effort for them. This is reflected in the increasing numbers we have had entering competitions and the diminishing wall space I have to display their work. One pupil who is sporty, not a bookworm at all, entered a poetry competition with a poem based on running. Amazing! Is it worth it from a librarian’s perspective? Definitely, as long as you don’t do what I did at the start and just announce it. Linking the competitions in with the school activities has to be the way to go. We:

- Linked our Stewart Ross Writing Workshop to a story competition asking the pupils to use the tips he gave them, sent the stories off to Stewart and he kindly posted letters of encouragement and prizes for the winners, given out at assembly
- Vaunted the winners of our shadow 500 Words competition on Book Day with Caroline Lawrence announcing the winners and generously giving them signed books as prizes as part of her presentation
- Tied in the FirstNews/Stabilo Young Journalist of the Year competition to the Year Eight post-exam project time (one of our boys was a runner –up)
- Tied in the Pushkin/FirstNews Letter Writing competition to the curriculum (one of our boys won and we had a few runners-up).

Take advantage of any chance to promote the competition and thus the value of said competition and the entrants. We are lucky enough to be visiting Chiddingstone Castle Literary Festival this year and we have entered their story competition too. Fingers crossed. Competitions are addictive and I’ve already thinking of a display for next year’s World Book Day competition (should they have one). My idea is to link books to their settings; for example, Katherine Rundell’s *Wolf Wilder* to Russia with illustrations of a wolf and an interactive flap with questions set by the History Department on Russia. Or possibly Will Grill’s *Shackleton’s Journey* with illustrations of the adventure and questions set by the Geography Department.

Or... maybe I should take my own advice and ask the pupils for their ideas and find out what activities will be going on in the school. In conclusion, competitions are definitely worth the effort even if they don’t result in success. To paraphrase Ernest Shackleton (who was referring to exploring not competing) ‘the only true failure would be to not compete at all.’

- *Susan Smith, School Librarian, The Schools at Somerhill, Tonbridge, Kent*
I have been reading the collected essays of writer, poet and farmer, Wendell Berry, and have almost been sunk under the avalanche of ideas that the book has provoked, ideas as much for my classroom and its ethos, as for the way I live my life. Berry believes absolutely in the local landscape to provide necessary definition to our lives and in particular the richness of stories to help root us to our homes, which really got me thinking: what are the stories native to the many communities to which I belong? My village? My county? My country? What stories tie other people to their native lands? In the classroom, do we tell enough such stories to orientate our pupils to the place some of them call ‘home’ for many weeks of the year? Does local mean thinking small? Does assessment and exam-taking kill the local impulse? Thus grilled, I set out in search of answers.

In the course of my searching, I was reminded of a remark made by a parent who had recently been abroad to a family wedding. We were discussing the rich myths of India, stories she said that served first as ‘life lessons’ but which also fixed civilisations so firmly to their traditions and landscape that nothing could shake their sense of belonging, particularly in times of national tragedy. Stories from our homelands, she said, allow us to work through great traumas, to make sense of them, to grieve and to move on; which led me to wonder if our modern children might lack knowledge of their own stories and, furthermore, were we moving so far from our original selves that we would soon no longer have that knowledge at all, or the ability to use it as a sort of collective ‘self-soothing’.

The stories native to my communities here in Dorset are very rich, and as with other counties, this landscape has inspired writers and poets of the highest calibre; if you have the opportunity to visit a county museum, you will be very surprised by who has been there. At The Dorset County Museum, ‘Writers’ Dorset’ displays quite how much this part of England (mostly bypassed by the Industrial Revolution and staying close to its farming roots) motivated great artists. A stroll across to neighbouring Wiltshire (Salisbury Museum) or Somerset (Museum of Somerset) will reveal further artistic wonders.

Wessex Tales by Thomas Hardy seems to me to epitomise the best of writing which ties us absolutely to a place, but through which we can explore and consider the profound but difficult act of being human: within these green lanes and small family farms are contained as much ambition, greed, injustice and bitterness, about which any hard-nosed metropolitan might be proud to boast. The brilliance and compactness of the stories have reminded me to get them out and bring them into the classroom again (I taught them to a Year 7 group some time ago). They also reminded me of the fantastic story collection, Cranford by Elizabeth Gaskell, a woman very much tied to a region in her writing, and then Flora Thompson’s Lark Rise to Candleford and of course that led me to Richard Jefferies and then Llewelyn Powys’ essays Wessex Memories (for truly beautiful descriptive writing, marvel at Powys’ depiction of a moonlit walk home, carrying freshly caught mackerel from the Dorset coast); after that I thought I better stop the train because there go the summer holidays again, planning how to incorporate these writers into next year’s forecasts; (last summer was used up agonising over how to bring John Clare and his nature poetry to the classroom; never have I been so glad that Edward Thomas wrote his poem ‘Swedes’, it was a fantastic shoo-in.)

It was then, in a total access of joy, that I came across This Little World: Stories from Dorset Writers (ISBN: 9781518718267). Serendipity is a word one longs to use more often and now, I legitimately could: this collection of stories comes from a project run by Dorset Writers Network (I didn’t know them; I am glad I do now – see http://www.dorsetwriternetwork.co.uk/), a cross-generational project with so many good aims that I could barely contain myself. This project had writers from 11-70 setting stories in their local landscape, from all compass points. My favourite story was set on Hambledon Hill (a hill very close to my heart) from the section ‘North’, in a story which puts modern day Dorset in relief against its Roman counterpart. I shall definitely be trying this with my pupils (I feel a field trip coming on), as well as using our local landscape as a great way to lead them to the complexities and joys of Hardy and Powys, Jefferies and Gaskell.

Thinking of modern, children’s writers, which was not my aim but would make for a further thought-provoking study, it is hard to avoid mention of the writer David Almond who so strongly evokes the colours of the North East and the cadences of its speech in all his children’s books; if you haven’t yet read Slog’s Dad, you should, for all sorts of reasons, but particularly its authentic dialogue. Jeanie Baker, from Australia, is another children’s author whose books have an overwhelming sense of their landscape and which are a fantastic discussion prompt about ‘place’, for all age groups; the books Belonging and Mirror particularly so.

But does ‘local’ (which in Wendell Berry’s book is the Kentucky farmland of his youth, which he subsequently made the home of his adult life), preclude ‘big ideas’ or profound writing. This is one such discussion I have had recently, having put the question to a group of my Year 6–8 pupils at our weekly Teabag Club (tea, cake, philosophy). In their opinion, of course great ideas can be had in the countryside (or small community) but they only come to fruition among the collaborative possibilities of the urban environment; so what to make of that? I am still pondering the answer, which may have something to do with the oft repeated mantra, ‘we are all global citizens’. Partly answering this question – though he knows nothing of our Wednesday philosophising – is Wendell Berry’s essay Two Minds. In it he describes the
Library Home Visitor Project

Enjoyable Routines

by Rhiannon Cook

Two years into my first job in school librarianship I was gaining in confidence and bringing my own personal touch to library sessions. I had worked in the public library sector before my Librarianship degree, working in the children’s library delivering rhyme times, story and craft sessions, assisting with school visits and taking the role of many characters in costumes. As the Assistant Librarian, one of my goals was to give pre-prep lessons more structure. Previously a parent had donated a box of six animal puppets that had sat in our storage cupboard, full of potential; I decided their time had come.

A few of my teacher friends had described a successful and highly engaging class project in which they sent a cuddly toy and exercise book home with pupils in a bag. Pupils would spend time with the toy over a weekend, record their adventures in the book with photos and writing, and report back to their class the following week. The main objective was to improve handwriting and build confidence but I began to reflect on how the assignment could be adapted to engage children – and their families – with reading.

We librarians like to imagine that all children get tucked in by a loved one and read a bedtime story but sadly, this is not always the case. So I had a goal: the children were to read bedtime stories to the library home visitor, a picture of them doing so would go in the exercise book and they would write a short paragraph about what they read, their favourite bits of the story and anything else they thought was relevant to their reading adventure.

I hoped the project would encourage parents to get involved once they saw the enthusiasm of the children and also, by modelling good reading behaviour themselves, the children would become more engaged and consider a book before bedtime a normal and enjoyable routine.

Sympathetic Mind (‘affection for its home place, the local topography, the local memories and the local creatures. It hates estrangement, dismemberment and disfigurement’) and the Rational Mind (‘objective, analytical and empirical, which tolerates all these things [estrangement, dismemberment and disfigurement] in pursuit of truth or money – which in modern practice, have become nearly the same pursuit’). In his mind, through our pursuit of the former state, we have lost connection with the latter, and I might suggest that with it, in part, the important act of sharing stories. So with my pupils I shall be revisiting some of the stories mentioned here (and others on the booklist), dipping in and out of these important stories, looking forward to shaping a new narrative in their thinking and writing and leading them a few steps nearer to engaging with those greatest chroniclers of landscape, such as Wordsworth, Clare, Bronté, Eliot and Austen.

For the Book Shelf

For the Pupils

Wessex Tales by Thomas Hardy
Cranford by Elizabeth Gaskell
Lark Rise to Candleford by Flora Thompson
A Country Child by Alison Uttley
Amaryllis at the Fair by Richard Jefferies
The Country of the Pointed Firs by Sarah Orne Jewett
This Little World: Stories from Dorset Writers, edited by Sue Ashby (Dorset Writers Network)
Wessex Memories by Llewelyn Powys
The Stone Book Quartet by Alan Garner

The Village Carpenter by W. Rose (memoir)
Southern Mail/Night Flight by Antoine de Saint Exupéry
The Man Who Planted Trees by Jean Giono
Apple Tree Lean Down by Mary E. Pearce (series)
Moonfleet by J. Meade Falkner (B.B.C. Audio CD)
The Magic Apple Tree: A Country Year by Susan Hill (because we love The Woman in Black)
Belonging by Jeannie Baker
Mirror by Jeannie Baker
A Bird on Water Street by Elizabeth O. Dulemba
Slog’s Dad by David Almond
The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett
The Little House in the Big Woods by Laura Ingalls Wilder or The Long Winter (from The Little House on the Prairie series)

For the Teachers

The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry (Allen Lane)
Little Toller Books (part of The Dovecote Press) whose purpose is ‘to revive forgotten and classic books about nature and rural life in the British Isles.’

Charlotte Weatherley is Assistant Head and Head of English at Knighton House School, Dorset.

Consider also extending your collections with stories set in other countries that reflect the diversity of our students’ backgrounds. The SLA publication, A World of Books in Translation by Joy Court and Daniel Hahn, could be a good starting point for this. —Ed.
I introduced the idea to six classes in years one and two in the first week of term and their teachers randomly picked their home visitor from a bag containing a description of the puppets. The classes were then given their first task: to think of a name for their visitor; the only rules being not to pick a silly name or to write their own name for reasons of fairness.

In the second week I prepared pencils, blank pieces of paper and an empty container in which to put our anonymous name suggestions. Children were very keen and although some required help with their spelling and handwriting, all were determined to write their own slips – a good start! At the end of the lesson I pulled out the winning name randomly and explained that the following week would see the library home visitor fully equipped with a diary and a labelled bag ready to go on its first adventure!

The bags were all simple canvas bags that can be sourced cheaply from most retailers and the A4 lined exercise books were left over from previous taught library lessons but most schools have a supplier they can order these from. The bag and diary labels were created on a website called Canva (https://www.canva.com/) – which I highly recommend for display work – along with a letter to each class from their home visitor explaining the purpose of their adventure. In the pilot year of the project, both classes were given the same letter which read as follows:

Hello,

My name is … and I usually live in the library with Miss Cook. I love reading and always listen to the stories told by the teachers, parents and children in the library.

Now I have decided to go on an adventure to visit your homes to see what sort of books St Aubyn’s children read at bedtime!

Add to my diary with a photo of you and I enjoying a bedtime story and write a little about what we read, which bits were your favourite and anything else you’d like to add about our story time.

Keep me for a week and return me on your next library sessions so that I can visit another child’s home.

Thank you for your help with my reading adventure!

… (the lizard) x

However, in its second year the goal for Year 2 students was changed to make the task different and further engage families – this year children have been challenged to include a photo of their home visitor reading with at least one family member, write about who they were reading with and what that family member was reading. Some of the children have struggled with this concept, largely because they were used to the format of the previous year but the majority have made a real effort to meet the aim and it has been a delight to see parents, and siblings in particular, getting involved.

Some of the challenges I have faced with this project include:

- Bags not coming back on time/coming back incomplete – this was a big barrier initially but as the project progressed, it became less so. Occasionally it was a matter of the child who took the puppet home falling ill; however, more often than not it was a case of children forgetting the bags or elements of the bags. Frequent reminders in library sessions, while repetitive, are necessary and employing the help of teachers to also remind children in class time is equally valuable. In all honesty, the disappointment of the class in learning that the library session couldn’t start with a home visitor presentation was enough to motivate the most forgetful of children!

- Upon enlisting the help of parents via email to return the home visitor bags on time, I discovered that a few were keeping the project for longer in an effort to encourage their children to practise their writing. In this instance, do not be afraid to name and shame! While their hearts are in the right place, parents were making the project less into an exercise in reading for pleasure and more into homework. A stern word backed up with an explanation is usually enough to prevent this happening again.

- Children not listening to instructions – this is particularly problematic in the first half term when the project idea hasn’t quite sunk in. Issues range from too many photos, no photo, no writing and photos or writing that are unrelated to the task appointed. I have seen my fair share of pictures dedicated to swimming lessons, dinners in restaurants and even a trip to Paris! Again, frequent reinforcement of the project objective is necessary as well as assuring children that, while it is perfectly acceptable for them to engage with the puppets in this...
way, that is not what the diary entry is for. I also discovered that occasionally the reason no pictures were included was because there was no printer at home, it had run out of ink or it was broken. When this happened the first time I reminded the children that we have printers in the library that they could have used by bringing in their photos on a memory stick with their parents or equally they could have emailed their photos for me to print out in advance. We had a good giggle about our problem-solving skills as a class and it was no longer an issue after that.

■ Parents not listening to instructions – as stated at the beginning of this article, teachers inspired and continue to use a similar project in their classrooms. Occasionally a child would ably explain the library objective and direct parents to the letter in the diary provided but the parent insisted on following the classroom method despite the protests of their child. Never make assumptions as to why the task has not been completed in the way it should.

I am lucky in that I have very supportive teachers as colleagues in the pre-prep department and regularly scheduled library lessons. Routine makes a project like this so much more achievable and I cannot stress enough that the sooner the project is started the better! Each class has twenty-one children and it is important that each child gets a chance. The library visitors have always managed to visit everyone each year and even go home with all of the enthusiastic teachers right at the end of the project; nothing delights the children more than a little window into their teacher or librarian’s home life!

It has been a joy to witness the children’s enthusiasm for reading with the library puppets and even more fantastic to see the variety of family members – if only for the moment the photos were taken – getting involved. What I wasn’t expecting was the whole-class support that I saw each time a new child was picked to take a library puppet home, the visible confidence boost of each child as they read out their entry and got a round of applause, the pleasure on their face as someone complimented their handwriting or asked a question about their book choice, and the conversations it prompted about our different languages, religions and culture as a whole.

The books, once finished, live on a library shelf where everyone can read them. They are a constant source of pride to the children who contributed and are viewed with regularity. For all the challenges, I would definitely say: mission successful!

■ Rhianonn Cook is Assistant Librarian at St Aubyn’s School, Essex.

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**Publications Update**

**Budgeting for Success: Planning and Managing the Primary School Library Finances**

*Karen Horsfield and Susan Staniforth*

978-1-911222-08-8  £13.50 (SLA members £9.00)

We all know budgets are tight. Planning and then managing the finances of the primary school library, whether large or small, is an essential job for all primary school library coordinators. Planning ahead, knowing and outlining the budget that you need to be effective and having a clear understanding of the library’s annual budget cycle are all important aspects of budget success. Here is our revised and updated Guideline that includes clear advice and useful templates to help you through this important process.

**Train to Gain: Continuing Professional Development for School Librarians**

*Barbara Band*

978-1-911222-09-5  £10.00 (SLA members £7.00)

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an important element of the career progression for all of us. Here, experienced school library practitioner, independent trainer and latterly President of CILIP, Barbara Band, reflects on the nature and range of CPD and why it is necessary. She examines the personal and organisational benefits, important aspects and possible challenges and barriers, and suggests some ways to undertake CPD in differing circumstances. This is a ‘must read’ publication for everyone working in school libraries who wishes to maintain their learning and keep their library knowledge credible and up to date.

**View our full publications list and order online: www.sla.org.uk/publications**
**Paperless Reads**

**Branded**  
Eric Smith  
**ASIN: B01ELBAYJU**

I’ve been waiting to read this follow up to *Inked* for a while and I’m happy to be able to say that I enjoyed it just as much as the first book. Main protagonist Caenum is older now and part of a band of fighters who want to take down the all powerful Citadel. The death of one of my favourite characters early on in the book left me in tears and there are more moments of pathos and loss throughout the story, although the book ends hopefully. This is a great sequel to *Inked* and would be enjoyed by lovers of magical adventurous stories. Action packed and fast paced, the tale kept my interest all the way, I loved it.

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**Welcome Home**  
Eric Smith  
**ASIN: B0747ZXJ1Z**

Eric Smith is the editor of this anthology and there are stories here from excellent YA authors, most of whom are writing from a position of personal knowledge. I have no experience of adoption myself but these stories touched my heart and caused me to shed many tears; so many different interpretations of the theme, all fascinating. I think my favourite story is *Empty Lens*, but it’s a very hard decision to make as there are so many that I enjoyed. Great anthology for dipping into but make sure you have your tissues handy if you are an empathetic reader!

Bev Humphrey, Editor, SLA Digital

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**Quozio**

[http://quozio.com](http://quozio.com)

*Quozio* is a very basic website that enables you to create quotes backed by images; you just enter your quote, who said it and click ‘go’. You are given a range of styles with a variety of backgrounds and fonts to choose from, although these are pre-determined so you cannot select the background from one and the font from another.

The website is free to use. However, you have to sign up in order to be able to do anything with your quote but this is quick and easy; all it requires is your name and email. Once created, you can then tweet your quote, email it to somebody, add it to your Pinterest account or there is the option to link Quozio to your Facebook account.

I found this website very simplistic; the home page is extremely basic and yet, strangely, also slightly confusing as you almost expect more. There is no About Us button; the Facebook link explains that their mission is to ‘revolutionise the quote industry’ and the Pinterest link takes you to all the quotes that people have created using Quozio.

Personally I think the range of designs is limited and I would also have liked the option to save my quote as a document so that it could be printed. Useful even though it has its limitations if you just want a quick way to display quotes, however the ‘revolution in the quote industry’ has not quite happened yet but one to watch in hope of further developments!

Barbara Band, School Library Consultant

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**SLADIGITAL Editor’s note:**

All the reviews in ict@sla are also available online in the members-only section of the website: www.sla.org.uk/ict-at-sla.

The site contains the full text of the reviews and readers are able to click directly onto links. Reviews are available in chronological order or through tag cloud searching by keyword.
Fun with Google
Exploring Hidden Features

Google has many hidden games and tricks – usually ones they have made for special occasions or that developers have made for fun. These are great to ease stress, eradicate boredom, impress the students you teach and for conversation starters. Although they are not one of the fundamental Google products, I definitely like sharing these with people!

Let’s start with Google’s Quick Draw. (https://quickdraw.withgoogle.com) Google will prompt you to draw something on the screen – this will be something simple like a door, a backpack or a phone. This AI experiment has Google guess what you are drawing. You’ll also be adding your own doodles to a large database for machine learning research. This is a great way to talk to students about the future of technology and whether they think technology is intelligent or not… and it is super satisfying!

Another Google AI experiment is Auto Draw (http://tinyurl.com/mneryvp) – which not only predicts what you are drawing, but then gives you much more professional looking versions. For example, I tried to draw a dog… and somehow it recognised my awful squiggle and gave me a much better version!

You can find more AI experiments here: https://aiexperiments.withgoogle.com/

My eleven year old brother told me about another funny Google trick – which is visiting Google Gravity (http://tinyurl.com/8hdw5fr) – where everything on the Google Search page drops to the bottom of the screen and bounces around, as if all the elements had just been impacted by gravity.

Test your own intelligence by predicting what Google will autocomplete by playing Google Feud: http://www.googlefeud.com/ There are four types of rounds; persons, names, questions and culture. I am awful at this, though I did correctly guess that the autocompletes for ‘has a dog ever been’ was ‘to space’.

You can test your geographic and general knowledge with Google’s Smarty Pins (https://smartypins.withgoogle.com), or GeoGuessr (https://geoguessr.com). If you happen to have an advisory class or a group of library assistants, these are great for team building and icebreakers at the start of the year!

There are plenty of other ways to have fun with Google, including Google Pac-Man (http://elgoog.im/pacman), Guitar (http://elgoog.im/guitar) and Underwater (http://elgoog.im/underwater). These are all worth playing around with for a few minutes. You can even get nostalgic by playing a version of Snake on your browser (http://elgoog.im/snake). You can find some more of these games here: http://elgoog.im/.

Now the only issue is that you need to try and magic up some spare time!

Lenny Dutton, Digital Innovation Coach, Atlanta International School

Trello
https://trello.com/

Trello is a project management tool for home or work life. It enables collaboration for a home project on e.g. organising a wedding, holiday, DIY project, or work activities where staff don’t share the same office or work the same hours. For pupil librarians or librarians and teachers collaborating on a project, this is ideal.

It can be used just by yourself as a visual oversight of boards that allow you to drag and drop cards into lists which can then easily be reordered. Individual cards themselves can contain checklists, images, attachments, deadline dates, coloured labels, and discussion notes from others who share the board. You can have as many boards as you want. Trello cards are like post it notes to arrange on a board which can be searched, shared, and used for reminders. For those librarians who love colour coding, with a colour for each project, you can easily see the interlinks with other projects. Although Pinterest works on the same board principle, Trello offers more functionality of manipulating text and attachments and a Pinterest Board can be linked for images.

When starting off a project, Trello can act as a mind map, putting all ideas onto cards for individual tasks, then ordering/prioritising them with due dates and adding any attachments. When tasks are complete, drag the cards to see progress. The cards can be archived to remove from the board altogether, although they are still searchable in Trello.

I liked the ability to create new cards on a board by writing or forwarding an email to my Trello account. The subject line of the email becomes the card’s title and the body of the email becomes the card’s description. Any files attached to the email will also be automatically added to the card.

You can also use Trello as a weekly planner, with lists for each day of the week to map out meals, chores, exercise routines (ha!), work assignments, and everything else you might list by day.

If you enable the Calendar you can see all your cards that have due dates attached to them in a monthly or weekly calendar view and sync your cards to your main calendar.

Trello provides templates to make life easier and the the basic Trello site is free and will be sufficient for most of us. Extra functionality comes with a price. This allows integration with other apps, extra storage, extra customisation and email support with a human being and a ‘guaranteed 1 day response time during business hours.’

Another layer offers a level I don’t even understand, but that would be for work purposes.

Trello can be linked to your Google account. It is supported in most mobile browsers, Trello has many shortcuts from opening, editing, and navigating cards to voting, creating new labels, and more.

Support: There are a number of written tutorials and articles on the Trello support page that help explain the software’s basic concepts and allow users to troubleshoot specific problems; most are accompanied by screen shots and/or step-by-step instructions. Trello has a Facebook platform to enable you to ask simple questions and these seem to be answered quickly. The Twitter feed serves a similar function and points out updates and suggests fun ways to use. The company uses one of its own Trello boards to let users suggest or vote for new ideas and see how features-in-progress are developing. The blog is well-written and appears to be kept up to date.

Trello would not be used for a company requiring budgeting tools or Gantt charts, but for home or school use this is a great planning tool.

Dawn Woods, Manager, SLS Worcestershire
Toondoo

Toondoo claims to be the fastest way to create cartoons in the world, a claim that most certainly requires testing, particularly with the growing demand for reading and being able to create comics among young people. Comics are now used for teaching children how to develop their story writing skills and encouraging them to think about the progression of stories amongst other purposes, particularly in primary school literacy lessons. Comics help reluctant readers engage with stories, they add life, colour and usually some form of mayhem... How can ToonDoo compete with a piece of paper divided into squares and a child’s imagination?

Well there is a choice of 15 different layouts for your cartoon, then there are the numerous selections of images that you can use to decorate your Toon – from fantasy castles to motorbikes, the usual Pow, Bam, Whoa and so forth, not forgetting the option to include clip art, your own images and much more besides. Look at the gallery of Toons created by other users and there will be more than enough inspiration to keep you going. There are not many instructions as to how to progress, write your Toon or save, much is done by clicking drop down menus to find out what is there and just navigating to relevant pages by guess work. I found it fun to use but it was actually quite slow – message kept pinging up to say that Acrobat (used extensively by this site) was slowing down progress. Most definitely a fun site and one that could be used for children who enjoy the challenge of visual literacy and working in the online environment but as to the claim of being the world’s fastest creator of comics I think I still favour pen and paper along with a good helping of imagination. The nice thing is with this site you can play around with ideas, chopping and changing them, inserting and deleting and being as creative as you like. Toons can be saved, multiple Toons can be made, they can be transformed into books when you have made enough of them and there is now even the option (for a charge) to print them too. If you want to have a go at adding your own images to the Toon you have created there is a doodle tool, images can be uploaded and the community of Toon creators can be engaged with. There is a lot of activity on this site but I think teachers and librarians need to consider carefully how they make use of it and with whom. It could be used as a resource to create book reviews or to design your own induction rules comic for new students.

Despite my slow experience I am certain it is a fairly quick tool, when used properly by children it could be very effective but I fear there is much to distract and unless it speeds up considerably users will spend most of their time searching for images to use rather than creating and developing stories. There is a paid for educational use version of the site however (http://www.toondooospaces.com) which might be less distracting and help encourage more focussed comic creation. This version has a sliding scale of payment depending on the amount of users and has some useful extra features for school use.

An interesting resource to research and to use in the correct context with children of the correct age ToonDoo certainly provides food for thought.

Louise Ellis-Barrett, Head of Library, St John’s School

Animal Rescue

by Patrick George

iOS/Android/Kindle, £1.99 each at time of writing

Animal Rescue is the interactive version of Patrick George’s rather wonderful Greenaway-nominated wordless picture book. It takes all of illustrator Peter Scott’s simple, bold and vibrant illustrations from the book, replaces the acetate overlays with interactive pages, and adds some clever, and very appropriate, sound effects and animation. If you haven’t seen the book, it’s designed as a set of two page spreads – one per animal and the acetate overlays reveal how much happier the animal would be in the wild. The app follows this format and the picture on the right-hand side shows the animal in captivity, or having been used by humans. Swipe the page, however, and the left-hand page shows the same animal in the wild. Because there is no text, and the images are age-appropriate, it is perfect for children of all ages. We tried it with Reception and Year 4, and both year groups got a lot out of it at their own levels. I also think it would be useful for EAL pupils, as everything is in the pictures. If you have a way of showing the app on an interactive white board, it’s a great way to start a topic on endangered animals, and trigger a discussion about animal rights, as well as acting as a catalyst for some very thoughtful fiction (why is the puppy living in a bin?) and non-fiction writing.

One thing to note is that if you search for Animal Rescue in the Apple App Store, the app isn’t listed. If however, you add the word ‘book’ at the end of the search term, it comes straight up – complete with an impressive set of 5-star reviews.

Overall, a very simple, but beautifully presented app which recreates the book perfectly – in fact, in some ways, it’s better than the book as the acetate pages aren’t going to be pulled out, drawn on, or crumpled! It’s also really good value, given that it could be used across EYFS, KS1 and lower KS2, and that it could be used as the basis for a whole topic on animal rescue. Highly recommended!

Adrian Thompson, ICT, Communications & Library, Sandal Primary School
Canva

Canva is a comprehensive website ‘empowering the world to design’ that covers a myriad of graphic design concepts. The basic features are free although these are so numerous and detailed that it is unlikely any non-commercial user would need to pay to upgrade. It is suitable for web, iPad and iPhone applications and has over ten million users.

The ‘Learn to Design’ section is a good place to start as it features thirty tutorials that cover topics such as basic design, fonts, colour, images, backgrounds and layouts. There are numerous templates featuring a range of document types, over one million images to use (many of which are free whilst the premium images cost $1) or you can upload your own and use the photo editor feature to improve them. Documents can be saved, shared or printed.

In addition, the site has a blog featuring design articles, interactive tutorials and tips; these can be browsed via category headings, probably just as well as there are almost five hundred of them and this number is being added to on a daily basis.

If you create your own posters, newsletters, leaflets, etc. then this website is perfect – although you are likely to spend longer selecting design options than creating the finished product as there is a huge amount of choice. It would also be perfect for anyone interested in graphic design – one to recommend to your students if they haven’t discovered it already.

Barbara Band, School Library Consultant

Three from YouTube

Walker Books

http://tinyurl.com/ydxoztbx

This YouTube channel has many videos to choose from. There are behind the scenes with Walker authors and illustrators – the In Conversation with Patrick Ness answering questions on the Chaos Walking series was particularly interesting. The book trailers are always worth a watch and I especially liked the trailer for This is Not My Hat by Jon Klassen. There are also picture book performance videos such as Michael Rosen performing We’re Going on a Bear Hunt which is very entertaining and would be fun for a reception or Year 1 class to watch.

I liked the author links of videos all in one place such as Anthony Horowitz and Cassandra Clare where you can watch interviews, book trailers and performance by those authors without having to search for them. I watched quite a few of the Sneak Peaks inside the interactive picture books which would be great to show in a Primary classroom before the students explore the books themselves.

The playlist section is also useful if you want to play book trailers on a loop in the library during the day. Walker Books is an interesting channel for both students and staff to browse.

Michael Rosen

http://tinyurl.com/jrax5w6

The first thing you get when opening this channel is Michael Rosen himself welcoming you to the page. There are so many of his performances to watch with videos of poems, kid’s songs and trailers. There are playlists for Jelly Boots, Smelly Books with Michael performing the poems and also from A Great Big Cuddle which would be perfect to have playing during events like National Poetry Day.

It is excellent to have all these performances on one page for easy access to single poems or playlists when needed. My favourite performances were Darren’s Car and Chocolate Cake.

NayaReadsandSmiles

http://tinyurl.com/yct9g9y8w

This is a channel from a vlogger who I have not come across before. Naya is from Hawaii and she vlogs regularly on books she has read, bought and has had sent to her.

I first started watching her Book Tube-a-thons and found her to be very enthusiastic and charming in front of the camera. Her posts are generally very entertaining and she is obviously a massive and eclectic reader as she vlogs about lots of different styles of books, fantasy being her favourite genre from what I could tell.

She does a couple of videos on unveilings of The Nerdy Post which I had to look up as the box she opened looked brilliant. The Nerdy Post site has different boxes to purchase of art, bookmarks, pins and other memorabilia from lots of fiction worlds such as Sherlock, Throne of Glass and Fantastic Beasts. What I also liked about Naya’s channel was her book reviews. She gives an honest opinion on what she reads and sometimes gives a book a score as low as 6/10 so she doesn’t just rave about everything, the reviews are very candid and she explains what she likes and wasn’t sure about for a lot of them.

I also liked the other vloggers whom she lists on her channel. I found a few new faces like WhittyNovels and Katiesbookdate which were also interesting to watch, especially Katie’s Netflix round up reviews of new shows.

For a bubbly, fun and passionate about reading vlogger, Naya is worth watching.

Beth Khalil, Librarian, Thoop Academy

Read online at www.sla.org.uk/sla-digital
Text 2 Mind Map
https://www.text2mindmap.com

What is it?
Text 2 Mind Map is a free to use website with which you can, as you can probably guess, create online mind maps. There are subscription levels available for a small fee but, for the basis of this review, I will cover the features of the freely available offer.

What can you do with it?
Text 2 Mind Map is easy-to-use and simple, with a clear interface that makes how to create your mind map fairly obvious, and straightforward. The home page greets you with basic instructions for getting started, and you can get going without creating an account or signing up, which is a rarity.

You can create your mind map using a text box, much like the tool in Microsoft Word, from which you can add your initial central concept and then build branches and sub-branches by levels of tab/indent. Having added my text to the text box, clicking the ‘Draw Mind Map’ button then creates your map, as you can see in the screenshot.

Once you have seen what the map looks like, you can continue to add, delete and modify the text within the text box, and re-draw the map with your changes. A nice feature is the option to be able to label the connection lines with text, simply by adding text in brackets before the element you want to label.

You can also zoom in/out and move elements of the map by clicking and dragging on specific, individual nodes to adapt the layout. You can also modify the look of the map by choosing the ‘Options’ tab at the bottom of the text box, and here you will find some basic options to personalise and format the text, colours and lines of your mind map.

When it comes to saving your work, you just need to add your email address and you will be given a unique URL for your mind map, which allows you to go back to it and edit it further at a later date. You are also given a link for a view-only version of your map, which you can then copy and share/email to others. Having tested this, anyone with that link can edit the map, but the edits they make are not permanent as they are not able to save them except as a new map.

I also tried the option to share the links to the map I created by email, as well as the option to be reminded of my maps by email, but neither of these options seemed to work, with no email being received at either of the two email accounts I tested it with. So as a word of warning, make sure you have the URL copied and/or saved somewhere, rather than relying on the email reminder/share option working.

One further option for saving your work, is the choice to download your map as a .pdf or .jpg file. This, of course, is a useful function to allow you to save your map ‘locally’, and reuse the map in other files/work.

Strengths
- Simple interface
- Control over the layout of the mind map (in contrast with, for example, ‘smart art’ tools in Microsoft Powerpoint/Word)
- Options for downloading
- Ability to share online

Limitations
- Email functionality doesn’t work
- Maps have a public URL, on free account (though this is probably not a problem unless you share that URL)

Summary
Text 2 Mind Map has a range of functions which make it a really useful mind mapping tool for staff and students.

It is straightforward and very easy to use, and so would be something that can be used by secondary school pupils of all ages, and I would think most junior school aged children too. It would be something that can easily be used in lessons for group work, teaching from the front to map out ideas with a whole class, or individually.

John Iona, Subject Liaison Librarian: Psychology, The Sheppard Library, Middlesex University
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https://www.eurobooks.co.uk/elimags
As we enjoy the early days of the new Children’s Laureateship we can celebrate the fact that with Lauren Child there will still be a national focus on the importance of illustration (although she is of course another polymath like Chris Riddell and an excellent writer of longer novels like her Ruby Redfort series). But illustration is vital to encouraging readers. We all know that, as Sarah McIntyre says about her Pictures Mean Business campaign, ‘a lot of kids come to books through pictures – it’s what catches their attention first, not the writing’. So the publication back in July of the very first Public Lending Right figures about the most borrowed books by illustrator was a milestone moment. The list was topped by the inimitable Tony Ross whose titles were borrowed more than one million times from the UK’s public libraries over the last year. Run by the British Library, PLR pays registered authors 7.82p each time one of their books is borrowed. Royalties are paid from a pot of around £6m, capped at £6,600 for each author. When a book has both an author and an illustrator, the loan payment is generally split between the two.

This often valuable contribution towards their income could not occur without collecting the data and, as librarians, we should be the most diligent about data. With the reviews in this journal we have always been careful to credit illustrators and translators where this information can be found. The tide has certainly turned with illustrators where sometimes now even the cover artist is credited in a book with no other illustrations! Nielsen Book Data is the most important place to get the data correct of course and that is the responsibility of the publisher, but how scrupulous are you about your library catalogue? You probably import your data from your book supplier but do you add missing details?

The diversity issue which raised its head this year around the publication of the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway longlist has made me think about other data. If somebody asked you what percentage of the books in your library were by BAME authors or artists, how would you know? Quite often we have to guess the gender of an author let alone any other characteristic! We could be more confident perhaps about identifying the content of books because we can keyword that on a catalogue and produce reading lists to support LGBT+ awareness and so on. It is incredibly useful when a list like this by Matt Imrie (http://teenlibrarian.co.uk/2016/09/19/an-incomplete-list-of-british-bame-authors-for-children-young-people/) is produced, but there is currently no way to find a definitive source of this information. Nielsen records only names, not gender, ethnicity or disability information about authors. Collecting that sort of data has definitely made a huge difference to levels of equality in employment; although we still have a long way to go, particularly in our profession. CILIP research showed a gender split in the library sector workforce of 78.1% female to 21.9% male and 96.7% of the workforce identify as ‘white’.

Against that background, where it might be felt that we have something to prove, how are we going to be able to prove that we have no unconscious bias in book selection and nominations for awards if we have no data? Guesses will be unacceptable. This will have to be something collected in a database like Nielsen; becoming part of the bibliographic information about the book. We would need new library catalogue fields too! An industry wide change like that will take a lot of achieving and a lot of debate to get agreement. Authors have the same right to privacy as any citizen and should be free to chose not to reveal such information. To me an equally important question is whether this makes any difference at all to the reader? Nobody would dispute the vital importance of every child being able to find themselves reflected in the books they read and they should also, of course, be able to see themselves as being writers and artists. So all the efforts to make publishing more diverse are moving in the right direction and we must actively seek out small imprints and debut authors from diverse backgrounds to review and purchase, but ultimately what matters to the reader is the quality of the book itself and no amount of data will change that truth.

Joy Court, Reviews Editor
Under 8

Ahmadi, Ahmadreza and Kazemi, Nahid

Alive Again
Translated by Azita Rassi
Tiny Owl, 2017, pp32, £7.99 978 1 910328 24 8

In this picture book, a boy wonders what happens when blossom disappears – does the word ‘blossom’ die, so that there will be never be blossom again? He wonders the same about rain stopping, wheat dying, a journey ending... but then spring arrives, and the boy’s father shows him new blossom, rain falling on the grains of wheat to make them grow, and promises a journey – the words are alive again. It is indeed very simple, but there is a lot to talk about, and the collage illustrations, using a lot of loosely woven fabric pieces, will provide more topics for discussion.

Ahmadi and Kazemi are an Iranian poet who has been shortlisted for the Hans Andersen Award, and the illustrations by Nahid Kazemi are good fun.

Diana Barnes

Alexander, Heather and Lozano, Andrés

Farm (Life on Earth)
Wide Eyed Editions, 2017, pp16, £9.99 978 1 84780 899 8

Who doesn’t like a ‘lift the flap book’? Farm is just that – a board book full of fascinating information about farm life explained through a question and answer method, with many of the answers hidden beneath a flap. Each page explores a different aspect of farming, from what a tractor does to who lives inside, what happens in the day time and what happens at night time, how does the farm differ each season and how do the senses become involved. There are pages giving an account of how to make bread from planting the seed to the finished loaf and also how to make ice cream, from where the milk comes from to the cone itself.

The book is colourfully and appropriately illustrated with clear images ideal for young recognition. I would recommend this book for both pre-schools and infant schools as a useful tool for exploring either country life or ‘What a farmer does.’ Younger children will enjoy lifting the flaps and the colourful pictures, whilst older children will also enjoy listening to or reading the fascinating facts.

Sue Breslin

Allan, Nicholas

Loo Queue
Red Fox, 2017, pp32, £6.99 978 1 782 95399 8

Billed as ‘a hilarious book of counting, colours, animals … and queuing for the loo!’ this is an amusing tale for those youngsters who like stories with a touch of humour. Told in rhyme, the que for the loo gets longer and longer as 10 different animals join the line. But who is in the loo?

Opportunities are there for counting, spotting the animals and naming the colours whilst enjoying this short colourfully illustrated book.

Sue Breslin

Andreae, Giles and Rozelaar, Angela

Winnie-the-Pooh: The Great Heffalump Hunt
Egmont, 2017, pp32, £6.99 978 1 4052 7830 0

Giles Andreae, author of Giraffes Can’t Dance, Commotion in the Ocean, Captain Finn and the Pirate Dinosaurs series and creator of Purple Ronnie has turned his hand to a Winnie the Pooh picture book. In the original books the Heffalump is a scary creature — the stuff of nightmares for Pooh and Piglet. Whilst the friends stroll together in the woods Pooh comes up with a grand plan to catch a Heffalump, and while Piglet is left to dig the pit, Pooh sets the trap with the last of his honey supply. Of course later Pooh has a hankering for a snack and returns to retrieve his pot, which, as do many of Pooh’s adventure, requires Piglet to overcome his fears to rescue his best friend. This beautifully illustrated version of the friends’ adventure is decorated with silver highlights on the cover depicting the moonlit trees and creatures. Inside double page spread illustrations predominate, and are complemented by Andreae’s rhyming text which will delight another generation of Winnie the Pooh fans as well as allowing older readers to reminisce with this gentle story of friendship, bravery, adventure and honey.

Wendy Worley

Barnett, Mac and Klassen, Jon

Triangle
Walker, 2017, pp48, £12.99 978 1 4063 7667 8

Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen’s partnership continues with their third joint outing. In this quirky, entertaining tale the duo explores shapes, texture and landscape in a style that is deceptively simple. Klassen’s distinctive use of colour; scale and white space is at the fore and fans of his earlier work will note the trademark eyes.

With a simple premise – Triangle decides to play a trick on Square and Square retaliates — Barnett and Klassen take the child on a journey through unfamiliar terrain, where triangles morph into boulders — dark, looming shapes with no name. Triangle’s sneaky trick plays upon Square’s fear of snakes; one with which readers of all ages can identify. Square runs after Triangle to play his own sneaky trick, but the reader is invited to guess whether it is intentional.

While the format and simple text of Triangle make it perfect for under 5s, its design and detail exploration of themes like fear and friendship offer opportunities for class discussion and extended reading. Older pupils will appreciate the complexity of Klassen’s illustrations and visual humour, and the text and illustrations work together to offer an alternative narrative perspective. It is also an ideal introduction for visual literacy-based classroom sessions and a perfect text to engage with reluctant, and less able, readers.

Alison Brumwell

Barton, Suzanne

The Butterfly Dance

Dotty and Stripe are two little caterpillars and the best of friends; Dotty is blue with spots while Stripe is red with yellow stripes. When they become butterflies they maintain their friendship, but as they explore the wider world around them they start being told about others of their kind and wonder if they should play with those. Their dilemma is finally resolved satisfactorily and everyone plays together in the meadow.

This is a delightfully charming story about friendship as well as about the natural world around us. The author has created characters that we can feel for and at the same time she gives us an introduction to some of the minibeasts that abound in our natural habitat. The illustrations are delicate and yet full of colour and movement. The layout is extremely variable with some pages having blocks of text while others have short curving lines. The images are also very variable in that there are some full page spreads but the majority of the pictures are either single or multiple images per page. This is a well written story with illustrations that complement it beautifully. It is going to have a firm place in the school, both for reading and for studying.

Margaret Pemberton

Biddulph, Rob

Sunk!
HarperCollins, 2017, pp32, £12.99 978 0 00 820739 7

Penguin Blue in a pirate hat and with a trusty crew of Cutlass Jeff, First Mate Flo, Wilbur Seal and Clive the polar bear in his rubber dinghy set off across the Seven Seas in search of treasure — a journey shown on a helpful map, the seas numbered as needs be so that we can follow the sailors’ journey. Their dinghy is a little small for
such a crew and is punctured by a swordfish, leaving them to sink to the wreck of the Neptune’s Dread, a galleon formerly captained by Walker Plank, who is marooned on a desert island. The Neptune’s Dread is raised by inflated puffer fish, tied to the ship by kelp, and a helpful whale, and Penguin Blue and his friends are towed home by a grateful Captain Walker Plank. Instead of treasure, they set up Captain Plank’s Playground, using Neptune’s Dread as a giant climbing frame, festooned with swings, helter-skelter and cannon spouting bubbles – and lots of happy penguins climbing the rigging and careering down the slides.

A rhyming text bounces along, accompanying cheerful, boldly coloured illustrations, with details to study at every viewing. Purists might object to a polar bear mingling with penguins, but this only adds to the rollicking fun.

Peter Andrews

Bishop, Sam and Lumbers, Fiona

I Like Bees, I Don’t Like Honey!

Faber & Faber, 2017, pp32, £6.99

978 0 571 33419 3

Written in conjunction with the NSPCC to explore children’s opinions about the everyday things they experience, this celebrates difference and encourages children to be honest about their feelings. Sometimes, as adults, it’s easy to assume what children like and what they don’t like while forgetting that we haven’t actually asked them what they think. This book allows children to voice the sometimes unexpected and hilarious things that matter to them in an accessible and fun way. Written in a playful rhyme with bright and lively illustrations, this book gives children the chance to learn about other people’s feelings and their own, and that it’s ok to like things that are different from their friends. Fiona Lumbers illustrations are a delight and easily capture the children’s personalities and expressions. ‘What do you like?’ And ‘what don’t you like?’ is asked throughout which is a great opportunity to interact with the book and get the reader’s opinion, this would be an especially good one to read to a small group. There is lots of scope for activities around the story and even some blank speech bubbles at the end to encourage discussion.

Emma Dunn

British Museum

123 (British Museum First Concepts)


978 0 85763 817 5

Nosy Crow publishers have produced what must be the most beautiful counting book ever for Early Years settings. 123 comes in tandem with ABC to celebrate a host of interesting artefacts held in The British Museum collection: statues, bowls, bags, drums, shoes, kites, beads, dolls, keys, cups, ornaments, hats, rings, spoons, coins – all are here in a variety of styles, fabrics and metals, illustrating art and crafts from around the world and across the centuries. Children will marvel at how the same objects that we all share in our daily lives can be so subtly different. An index explains where and when all the artefacts come from.

As well as learning basic concepts, youngsters can speculate about the origin of each object; they can draw and make their own version and I would hope be encouraged to visit their local museum. They will learn at an early age to appreciate artistic objects, learning to love the old, the new, the different. Colours and Opposites are due out in the Autumn and I, for one, can’t wait to snap them up.

Angela Redfern

Burgerman, Jon

Splat!


978 0 19 274954 3

Splat! is clearly a very messy book: the first picture book by internationally renowned artist Jon Burgerman. This is primarily a picture book with giant-sized explosive onomatopoeic accompaniments and occasional chatty observations. We start off with a green splodge that evolves page by page: the splodge develops eyes and then a custard pie is superimposed followed by random objects including hundreds and thousands, a sandwich and chickens pecking at the sandwich. Then the whole concoction disintegrates when an electric fan is switched on. We may hope that normality will be restored and then everything falls apart again.

This is truly a celebration of chaos which is probably more realistic than ‘they all lived happily ever after’. Children will love talking about the pictures and interpreting what is going on. This is a brilliant, anarchic picture book to share with children although not recommended for faint-hearted adults.

Mary Crawford

Caston, Jane and Saldáña, Carmen

Will You Help Doug Find His Dog?


978 1 78285 320 6

This is a child’s picture book designed to initiate child/parent conversation and interaction with the text and illustrations. There are loads of friendly, slightly scruffy dogs to pick and choose and talk about. It will clearly appeal to a child growing up in a dog environment. For the child who neither has nor regularly meets dogs much of the appeal would be diluted. Most of the dogs are recognisable breeds, but not fussily so and there are plenty of miscellaneous mongrels. The story is very simple, simply identifying which of the dogs is Doug’s but the pictures amuse and the variety of font used for the text may well serve to draw in the reader.

Nick Hunt

Coughlan, Billy and Frost, Maddie

How Do You Do, Mr Gnu?


978 1 84886 242 5

Children and adults alike will love this hilarious tale featuring Mr Gnu. Upon receiving an invitation to tea with the Queen, Gnu decides he needs to learn some manners and so sets off to take advice from his friends – with hilarious consequences. There is many an opportunity for different story ‘voices’ in this book and you will soon be giggling alongside your child as you read Mr Gnu’s various attempts.

Gnu visits many different characters, and it is good to see some less obvious animals featured in this book. There is a great opportunity for discussing appropriate manners, in a relaxed and amusing setting – your children are sure to have their own ideas! The illustrations are attractive and interesting, particularly at the end when Gnu finally meets the Queen.

Overall, a very funny read. Good luck reading the final page without laughing!

Hannah Breslin

Daly, Niki

Surprise! Surprise!


978 1 91095 999 2

Mr and Mrs Tati are happily married and comfortably housed, but they have, in this lively hardback, one sad omission – a new-born child! They find that buying a baby is impossible. But, cycling home one day, Mr Tati buys a pink pig to cheer his wife, an act that uplifts her spirit, an uplift enhanced by their close relationship. As baby Potter grows, they equip him carefully for school – but the school’s headteacher insists that little pigs are not allowed a place in the school. Saddened by this rejection, the Tatis set about improving their child’s life – with games, a straw bed, a weekly bath and a chance to sleep with them in their comfy bed. Somewhat sad at their son’s porcine features, his parents wish he could be more like them. And their wish comes true – as they become pigs themselves!

The artwork in this tale is of high quality as is the handling of a narrative which is likely to be much enjoyed by readers!

Trevor Dickinson
There are living things everywhere we look and the more we look the more we discover. Lots! Too many to count! From the top of the jungle trees to the bottom of the deepest ocean, from the coldest arctic wasteland to the inside of volcanoes, even living on other life forms, creatures and plants can be found everywhere. Some haven’t even been discovered yet and some are no longer with us. All living together as part of a big, beautiful pattern, depending on each other for survival.

Fantastic, colourful and detailed illustrations accompany the lively text as we are taken on a journey through a variety of habitats worldwide. Each page shows a plethora of living creatures, some very similar and some almost camouflaged within the other living things, like a huge pattern of life. How many can you count is an obvious question when sharing with younger readers.

This is a beautifully illustrated introduction to the concept of biodiversity and will be enjoyed by readers both young and old.

Sue Breslin

Tibs the Post Office Cat

978 1 91027 720 1

Tibs the Post Office Cat is based on a true story – Tibs was employed by the Post Office (he was paid two shillings and sixpence a week to cover the cost of his milk) to catch the mice who were nibbling through all the letters and mail sacks, but instead of helping them he makes friends with them! All the mice want to have a name but Tibs can only think of ‘Fred’, so in exchange for finding them names the mice promise to help Tibs to keep the post office clean and tidy. At its simplest level the book tells a story of friendship and hard work, dig a little deeper and you find a way to explain how enemies can become friends and how to solve a difficult situation by working together.

This book evokes memories from my childhood and feels a little bit like something that Shirley Hughes might have written with its busy illustrations and traditional story. It seems a little bit long to start with but once you get into it, this is a great story for slightly older children and I’d recommend it for age 6 and upwards.

Emma Dunn

The Unexpected Love Story of Alfred Fiddleducking

978 1 4063 7427 8

Alfred starts life as an egg, snuggled safely in a fiddle case owned by Captain Alfred, on a boat laden with ducks for the farm. A storm comes up, and the little duckling finds himself alone with the fiddle, but it is Alfred’s fiddle, so, when he finally reaches land, the sound when played is recognised by his dog, and the gentle lady in a grey coat who is his anxious wife, and, as this is a picture book for young children, there is, finally, a happy ending.

The story has a lot of drama as the duckling is beset by various worries, but the sound of the fiddle is very comforting, and the relationships it brings are magical – the dog and duckling become best buddies, and the lady says he is a very special duckling. The illustrations are delightful, and this should be a really good story to share.

Diana Barnes

Through the Gate

978 1 925335 41 5

A large format hard backed book which addresses the theme of change and how we adapt. The story is about a little girl whose family move to what appears to be a run-down and dilapidated old house. She can see that the ‘new’ house certainly doesn’t look new. She’s in a new town at a new school. Every day when the girl arrives home from school she notices something has changed at the house. As the story progresses the little girl starts to take notice of the environment around her and finally she makes a friend who she walks home with.

Throughout the story we can see that as the little girl is settling into her surroundings her ‘new’ house is slowly looking smarter and tidier until at the end of the story it looks like new house. To reflect the changes, Fawcett has illustrated the book by using monotone drawings with colour only being used for the nice, positive elements such as the little girl. As the girl starts to notice and enjoy the things around her they too are illustrated in colour such as, a flower on the path, a puppy that wanted to play and a tree of juicy plums. The story concludes with the little girl who is now happy, arriving back at her tidy new home, with the final pages all illustrated in glorious technicolour.

This is a beautifully illustrated and charming story to share with any young child who is going through change. It creates a starting point for further discussion on the story and can be related to it to a child’s personal circumstances.

Elizabeth Baskeyfield

Under 8

There’s a Walrus in My Bed!

Andersen, 2017, pp32, £11.99
978 1 78344 492 2

Flynn’s new bed has arrived – together with a resident walrus: Mum and Dad simply don’t believe Flynn. But Walrus is hungry, with a rumbling tummy – so Flynn makes a large snack; Walrus is cold – so Flynn fetches blankets; Walrus is too hot and needs a glass of milk, and then has to use the bathroom – unseen by Mum and Dad, as Walrus is behind the door; Flynn sings Walrus to sleep, who isn’t impressed – neither are Mum and Dad; Walrus needs a nice, big cuddle and falls asleep – but there’s no room for Flynn in the bed. So … Flynn asks Mum and Dad if Walrus can share their bed; Mum and Dad agree; Walrus goes to sleep; Flynn goes to sleep; and Mum and Dad can’t sleep as there’s a walrus in their bed. This is a very funny book with its restful colours and the looks on the faces of Mum and Dad – longing-suffering, on that of Walrus – going from grumpy to embarrassed, enormously sneezing all over one page, soaking Flynn in the process, and happily content when at last asleep, as well as on that of Flynn, faced by a very big problem for a small boy.

Peter Andrews

Questions Asked

Translated by Don Bartlett
Elsewhere Editions, 2017, pp72, £10.99
978 0 91467 166 4

Jostein Gaarder introduced children to philosophy with his novel Sophie’s World, and this little picture book looks as if it would do the same for younger children. He asks serious questions about life and how to live it, some quite straightforward e.g. ‘Do I need to have a lot of possessions to be happy?’ and others very thought-provoking e.g. ‘How do I do talk? How do I find the exact words I need from all the words in my head?’ Each question is one side of a double page spread, and the right-hand page is a lovely illustration by Akin Duzakin, some in sepia, others in pastel colours, of a boy travelling through various places until he reaches home and his book with empty pages, waiting for him to write down what he thinks his life will be like. There are certainly some challenging questions here, and this will be a good starting point for discussion for infants and juniors.

Diana Barnes

Cinnamon

Bloomsbury, 2017, pp40, £12.99
978 1 4088 7923 8

This is a tale about a young princess called Cinnamon whose eyes are made of pearls, which sadly means that she is blind. But the Rajah and
the Rani’s recent worries are mostly about the
to Cinnamon doesn’t speak, so they offer
all sorts of treasures to anyone who’ll try to make
her talk. After many people tried and failed, a
magnificent tiger accepts the challenge and
leaves Cinnamon life lessons that will help her
open up and choose a destiny that her parents
may not have expected.

This gorgeous and exotic tale with vibrant and
striking illustrations has magic written all over it;
it has a beautiful, fairy tale-like dimension which
instantly gives it a certain element of elevated but
not at all inaccessible storytelling. I liked how you
can read and re-read this story in many different
ways, ask lots of questions and come up with
answers which may not necessarily match ‘what the
author meant’. The fabulous tiger is so
dignified and noble that it’s really hard to move
your eyes away from him; the brilliant oranges
and greens, especially on the cover, are so rich
and enchanting that you know instantly that this
is a very special book. I also liked the naughtily
humorous element about the girl’s constantly
ragging aunt, whose forgotten beauty comes to
attention again when the only memory of her,
after she became the tiger’s snack, is an old
portrait of her as a young woman.

Macarena Currie

Gervais, Bernadette
The Ladybird
978 1 78627 001 6

It would be difficult to beat such an imaginative
book for 3-5 year olds, choosing a ubiquitous
animal as the ladybird and illustrating it in all its
beautiful colours and spots. The artist with the
talent for making ladybirds even more appealing
to children is Bernadette Gervais. She has
beautiful pages of differently coloured ladybirds
and plays with the spots to see if children can
spot the difference!

It is also a pop-up book, as there are sections
showing the life history or how the colours
change with age. Basic form and function of
ladybirds is well illustrated. This is a magical book
for tiny children and this English edition of the
book which was originally published in France is
highly recommended.

John Feltwell

Grey, Mini
The Bad Bunnies’ Magic Show
978 1 4771 5760 8

A very funny story about two bad bunnies! When
great magician ‘Hypno’ goes missing just before a
show, his rabbits Abra and Cadabra step in to
save the day. . . or do they? Humour, showmanship and panache abound in Mini Grey’s
new picture book.

Rich colour and exuberant detail flood each page
but the real showstopper is Mini Grey’s clever paper engineering. This is not your standard lift
the flap book – here the flaps are half overlapped
pages or shaped edges cleverly contributing to
the stage setting and visual trickery: a drawn back
velvet curtain, a puff of smoke, a frisson of magic,
all adding to the sense of mystery and surprise.

Story and pictures go hand in hand to conjure a
sense of theatre that’s hard to resist. It’s a book
that actively courts audience participation – both
in the lifting of a flap and in the delivery of the
words. You’ll find yourself booming out ‘Hey
Presto!’ and its many variations with relish.

Lizzie Ryder

Hancocks, Helen
Ella, Queen of Jazz
978 1 84780 918 6

‘Ella loved to sing and she sang good.’ The story of
Ella Fitzgerald is retold sympathetically in this
picture book by Helen Hancock. The focus is on
her early struggles, the good fortune of her chance meeting with Marilyn Monroe, and
the triumph of her acceptance by white audiences
and her subsequent fame. This is an inspirational
biography which gives young readers an insight
into the struggles of a pioneering woman in a
prejudiced society. There is a strong emphasis on
the importance of determination; this is no fairy
tale and Monroe is not a fairy godmother;
Fitzgerald succeeds due to talent and a refusal to
give in. Hancocks makes Ella Fitzgerald’s life
inspirational. Both Monroe and Fitzgerald are
depicted in both text and illustration as real
women, strong and substantial on the page as
they were in life. The pictures, like the text, focus
on the important moments; the page which
shows Ella sitting under a street light, her hands
despairingly over her face, is particularly moving.
Text and pictures certainly work together very well
to evoke empathy and understanding of an
outstanding person living in very difficult times.

Jaki Brien

Honey, Elizabeth
That’s Not a Daffodil!
978 1 74336 880 0

Tom is a bit dubious when kindly neighbour, Mr
Yilmaz, brings him an unpromising-looking
daffodil bulb in a crumpled paper bag. But while,
over the next few months, Mr Yilmaz teaches Tom
a little about gardening, he also teaches him a
little about taking care of things and of people
in this story for younger readers. In return, Tom
shares a child’s-eye view of the plant’s progress,
from onion bulb, to beak, rocket, and streetlamp,
and finally to flowering plant.

I enjoyed the calm at the centre of this book: the
unhurried friendship between Tom and Mr Yilmaz.
There is bustle throughout, but you spot it out of
the corner of your eye: Mr Yilmaz’s trip abroad;
the absence of Tom’s parents (off doing grown-up
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Encounters
Jason Wallace
May HB 9781783445288

Www.andersenpress.co.uk
Hood, Morag

When Grandad was a Penguin

Two Hoots, 2017, pp32, £11.99

978 1 5098 1 401 5

This is a gentle picture book with a very important message. We are not told so explicitly but we, as adults, understand that we are reading about a grandad with dementia, a grandad who may sometimes be confused but a grandad who we love and will care for.

This charming and quirky book, from its front cover, which if you touch you will discover is very tactile, to its end pages where there are plenty of penguins to see, is a true delight. Start the story and discover even more for here is a story of a mix up, a penguin and a grandad who managed to swap places! How and why we do not learn but neither does it matter, what matters is the little girl whose penguin grandad explores some of the strangest places. See him here in the loo, there in the fridge and even in the fish tank. Learn about how a penguin might behave if he or she were bought home, learn about what they love the best and discover how one little girl can bring her grandad home and put the penguin back where he belongs!

With delightful and bright illustration for children to enjoy this book entertains its reader whilst gently conveying an important message. Share it, enjoy it, learn from it.

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Hoopmann, Kathy

All Birds Have Anxiety


978 1 78592 182 7

A curious little book, with lots of photographs of real birds that wouldn’t be out of place on a shared meme in Facebook, along with thoughts about anxiety in different situations. Surprisingly it works very well. As a text, it is a very good description of different facets of anxiety such as ‘Your mouth goes dry and it’s hard to swallow,’ “When we are overwhelmed and frightened, we see everything that goes wrong and nothing that goes right,” and ‘We are worried that others will watch everything we do, and judge us.’

Each statement has a picture of one or more birds in situations which, I confess, are beautifully summed up by the statement. For example ‘If anyone comes looking for us, we hide,’ is illustrated by the just the crest and one eye of a bird looking out of a hole in a tree. It would be useful for discussion on anxiety, how it manifests and different ways of dealing with it. Oh – and the pictures would make you smile a lot!

Janet Dowling

Jarvis

Mrs Mole I’m Home!


978 1 4063 7243 4

Written and illustrated by the creator of Alan’s Big Scary Teeth, this is another book jam-packed with humour and detail. Mr Mole is tired after a long day of work at Gordon Ratzy’s and heads off home. The only problem is that he has lost his glasses (which are actually on the top of his head and remain there throughout his journey) so ends up burrowing into some interesting and unusual places.

The illustrations in this book fill the pages from edge to edge. They are full of things for children to spot and talk about, as well visual and textual jokes that will keep adult readers amused. The full colour spectrum has been used to give each location a distinct and individual feel, and the text is perfect for moving children from shared to independent reading.

Barbara Band

Jones, Pip and Hughes, Laura

Wanted: The Chocolate Monster

Faber & Faber, 2017, pp32, £6.99

978 0 571 32751 5

With a lively text by Pip Jones and with brilliantly comic art work by Laura Hughes, this extravagant text offers a unique crime world! A lofty monster has been seen in disguise stealing the Chocolate Monster’s hoard! Children are being warned to be alert to chocolate robberies on the street, in shops – and in their own homes where Mum, Grandma and Dad are all potential victims! Is the cheeky monster at the heart of the robberies? Keen young readers will surely let us know!

Peter Dickinson

Kahiu, Wanuri and Adreani, Manuela

The Wooden Camel


978 1 911373 13 1

Etablo dreams about racing camels. But soon economics gets in the way and the camels are sold to buy water. Etablo is told by the Sky God that his dreams are enough, but that doesn’t stop him attempting to ride other livestock owned by the family. Eventually his elder sister makes him some racing camels, carefully whittled from wood, and Etablo races these through the dunes and through his dreams.

Latimer, Alex and Latimer, Patrick

Woolf


978 1 84365 340 0

Perhaps a rather unusual way of applauding difference, whether racial, gender, cultural, physical or behavioural, with KS1 children, however, this book is written with such a strong sense of humour that it won me over completely. There is a feast of laugh-out-loud moments as the author and illustrator, with tongue in cheek, play with language and concepts…so we have not exactly a wolf in sheep’s clothing, but a mixture of the two, a wolf baaing (instead of howling) at the moon then shearing off his woolly bits in order to be accepted by the wolves or trying styling mousse to disguise his pointy ears and haircurlers to alter his bushy tail in order to fit in with the sheep. Of course, the whole tale is founded on a zany premise but once you suspend your disbelief, it is a lot of fun and will have the class giggling away in no time. Underneath, lies the important message about not needing to fit in with the crowd but instead celebrating individual differences and being true to oneself.

Angela Redfern

Litchfield, David

Grandad’s Secret Giant

Frances Lincoln, 2017, pp40, £11.99

978 1 84780 847 9

The little boy, Billy, at the centre of this story, does not believe his Grandad’s tales of a kind giant who is always looking out for opportunities to help them and the people of their town. So when they need someone exceptionally tall to help them to finish painting the town mural, Billy is reluctant to seek the obvious help.

David Litchfield tells this story in sumptuous double-page spreads, which show detailed views
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Under 8

of the town and the surrounding countryside at night, in the day time and from different viewpoints. Litchfield combines traditional and digital techniques to create these images, allowing him to create tableaux that are both breathtaking in their scale and rich with intricate detail. They invite long and careful exploration: sharp-eyed readers will notice, for example, the illustrations’ exploration of the consistently realised geography of the beautifully-realised seaside town setting, its landmarks seen from a variety of viewpoints in the background while the plot plays out in the foreground. This richness cleverly supports the storytelling, encouraging us to explore beyond what initially catches our eye. What we can see, and Billy misses, is the giant, peeping over walls, hidden in tree branches, towering over rooftops and wading through the sea. A number of these scenes are extremely funny: a fine example of visual humour that is created using the unique properties of the picture book as a medium.

Because Billy can’t see the giant, he doesn’t believe in him; his Grandad tells him he is not looking hard enough. When Billy does see him he is terrified initially, which enables the author to help the reader to learn that it is difference which can be frightening, not the person themselves. The striking use of light and shadow in each of the illustrations means that, when the giant finally emerges from hiding, he and Billy are both bathed in the light of friendship.

The conclusion of the story is an opportunity to celebrate the power of friendship, whatever the size of the prospective friend. Children will enjoy exploring the detail of the illustration, and, by looking hard enough, seeing not only the giant, but his striking resemblance to Grandad.

Chris Lockwood

McCarney, Rosemary

Where Will I Live?

978 1 78026 404 2

This is a book of photographs, taken in many places around the world, of children and their families travelling from their home countries, where ‘sometimes scary things happen to good people’, and it presents children with some of the realities of being a refugee. Some children ride on carts, others have to travel across deserts, along fences, in boats; they sleep under the stars, or in makeshift tents, or in a whole city of tents. Sometimes they might have to share a bed if they have one at all, and sometimes the weather is cold, but sometimes they might find a special friend, or a few friends to play with along the way – children can, occasionally, just be children. At the end, someone might say ‘Welcome’, and perhaps that person will be you. The photographs are excellent, and this book could be a good basis for group discussion and better understanding.

Diana Barnes

McKee, Brett and McKee, David

Sir Ned and the Nasties

Andersen, 2017, pp32, £11.99
978 1 78344 534 9

Join Sir Ned as he sets off on his daring adventure to find The Nasties. He receives some help along the way, but all is not what it seems…

Children will be instantly drawn to the brilliance of this simple story idea. Sir Ned is a loveable character, with quite the quest – to find those Nasties. He meets some other story book favourites who try to thwart him, but Ned gets the last laugh. Eye-catching illustrations, which spare no detail, only add to the delight of this book. The rhyming structure makes it an appealing read, though the scan does falter at times. Overall, this doesn’t detract from the story, especially as it has all the trademarks of an excellent adventure. If your children love a quest-tale, and enjoy surprising twists, this is a definite recommendation for you. Mine particularly loved the reference to a new set of characters – ‘The Stinkies’ – at the end of the book. I wonder where Sir Ned’s adventures will take him next…

Hannah Breslin

Milner, Kate

My Name is Not Refugee

The Bucket List, 2017, pp32, £6.99
978 1 911370 06 2

This book comes with an endorsement by none other than Jacqueline Wilson, which is praise indeed. It gives an insight into the plight of a child refugee fleeing a dangerous situation at home to find asylum elsewhere. You have only to open the book to the endpapers to see the row upon row of tents, reminiscent of Calais, to send a chill down the spine. It touches on many of the hazards along the way: the long distances, the rough and ready sleeping arrangements, the tedious waiting, tiredness, strange languages, strange food, feeling scared. Overall, it paints a very optimistic, totally a-political picture, you know there will be a happy ending for this child and his mother. It will certainly help very young children to put themselves in someone else’s shoes and to offer the hand of friendship to young refugees that they come across in school or in their neighbourhood.

So, an ideal book for Nursery and KS1 children. But where is the book for KS2 and KS3? The realistic book that spells out the abject fear and the multiple dangers, the exhaustion, the abuse at the hands of unfeeling strangers, the book that tells us that there is not always a happy ending for refugees? The book that tells us what we can do to help refugees now rather than wait till a mere handful arrives safety on our shores?

Angela Redfern

Newson, Karl and Fleming, Lucy

Fum

978 1 84886 243 2

An unusual mix of fairy tales and rhymes that will have young readers anxious to name the other stories that appear in this tale. When Fum, the youngest member of the Crum family goes missing the whole family sets out to find him. As we go through the story we gradually realize that this is not your average family, in fact they appear to be giants. In their travels they meet up with diverse characters such as Red Riding Hood, Goldilocks and the Three Little Pigs. Eventually the missing Fum turns up, as he climbs down from a beanstalk.

The tale is told in rhyme and this brings a flow to the story. It is quirky and yet familiar at the same time and will no doubt lead to the included stories being told in full. The pictures are lively and vivid with plenty of action and movement. The pages are divided into varying sized sections, from horizontal page breaks to full double page spreads. There is a lot to see and a wonderful sense of the normal mixed with the fantastic. It is an excellent addition to the library of any nursery or reception class and can be used as a starting point for all kinds of activities.

Margaret Pemberton

Peet, Mal, Graham, Elspeth and Tuya, Jez

The Treasure of Pirate Frank

978 0 85763 890 8

The boy who wants to find the treasure or Pirate Frank undertakes a treacherous journey, across water, up and down mountains – to find his gold. When he gets there, he finds a surprise waiting for him – what will he do?

If your children love a story with rhythm, this is a must-read. The scan is perfect, and the repeating sentences make it a joy to read aloud and even better to listen to. Your children will soon be joining in with the journey, as it is told in ‘map style’, following the boy’s adventures. The book is well illustrated, and the map at the beginning is brilliant for the children to go back to, to retell the tale. This kind of story is perfect for oral storytelling, and can be easily learnt by small children to read aloud themselves. Perhaps you may find yourselves undertaking your own, very similar journey soon after reading!

Hannah Breslin
Puttowk, Simon and Egnéus, Daniel

The Thing

978 1 4052 8371 7

This is a delightful picture book telling a simple story about The Thing that falls from the sky and is found by a group of strangers who collectively decide to befriend it and keep it safe. As its existence becomes known, it makes news all over the world. Then just as mysteriously as it appeared it becomes ‘unfallen’ and disappears over night without a trace.

The story is clearly making a social comment on how strangers are treated by others and how once the initial curiosity and interest in their diversity has worn off, how suspicion and dislike creeps into behaviours. Of course a three-year-old, enjoying the story at its charming face value, is unlikely to understand this deeper interpretation but it is a book with a strong message about modern life.

The illustrations are full of fun and the colour palette light and fresh. The creatures are pure imagination and are drawn with the younger reader in mind. This is a lovely bedtime read with plenty of opportunity for discussion.

Jane Loder

Root, Phyllis and Karas, G. Brian

Anywhere Farm

978 1 4063 7686 5

Anywhere Farm is aptly authored by Phyllis Root with beautiful, retro styled illustrations by G. Brian Karas. With the assistance of soft pencil crayoned pictures, the story explains that the only things needed to have an anywhere farm are soil, sunshine, water and a seed. It goes on to tell the reader where they can have their anywhere farm, from a cup to a balcony and who will visit. It shows that anyone can have their own anywhere farm, nowhere is too small and with soil, water, sunshine and care, anywhere farms can be everywhere.

This is a lovely book to share with your pupils, perhaps before you embark on creating your own ‘anywhere farm’ at school. With its matt cover, cream pages and brown text alongside the delightful illustrations, the book itself looks eco-friendly and certainly provides a great message for your pupils.

Elizabeth Baskeyfield

Ross, Tony

Our Kid

Andersen, 2017, pp32, £11.99
978 1 78344 493 9

This big, bold hardback is well-blessed by Tony Ross’s remarkable artistic skills and by his witty inventions of new words – words such as ‘shoffled’, ‘dunkle’, ‘bumpedeed’ and ‘felumpingly’ and many others! His narrative in this offering centres on the naughty goat who makes his slow way to school – paddling, watching a submarine leap out of the sea, riding on it as it makes its way down the road. He’s robbed by pirates who steal his trousers and his school bag. Rescued by an elephant (who thought him glumblumious) he goes slowly to school where he is put in the Naughty Corner. It’s there that aliens bring him his trousers and his stolen bag. In Our Kid Tony Ross has produced yet another marvellously unique miracle!

Trevor Dickinson

Rustad, Martha E. H.

Baby Animals in Pouches (Baby Animals and Their Homes)

978 1 4747 3329 8

The contents page couldn’t be more self-explanatory: Inside and then Outside. The first set of pictures and texts shows the tiniest animals tucked into their respective mothers’ pouches, while the later photographs show the increasingly independent young animals out and about or attached or close to their mothers. We see the new-born bandicoot completely hairless with its eyes still closed and at the end: two baby opossums balancing on a branch and looking like a smaller version of their mother.

There are four books in the series Baby Animals and Their Homes: as well as pouches these include burrows, nests and dens. The subject matter of these books will be very appealing to young pupils. The font used is large and the text is clear and succinct. The book follows a conventional layout: contents page, index, glossary and suggestions for further investigation which will help to accustom young children to use books for reference. The books are sturdily produced hardbacks and the series is highly recommended.

Mary Crawford

Rustad, Martha E. H.

Today is a Windy Day (Pebble: What is the Weather Today?)

978 1 4747 3875 0

One of a new series about the weather with other titles in the series looking at cold, heat, rain, snow and sun. The book is divided into three sections; first of all describing the wind, then explaining the contrast between light wind and strong wind and its effects and then lastly, the uses of wind. Each double page spread describes an aspect of the wind complemented by bright illustrative photographs. The weather is both a regular topic in infant school classrooms and an important introduction to science so this series fulfils both functions. The text is clear and sentences are kept short. Given the scientific nature of the topic, some subject specific vocabulary is used which is explained in a short glossary. Other reference book features are an index and suggestions for sources of additional information: both books and websites. This series would be a useful addition to resources in the infant classroom.

Mary Crawford

Schwartz, Joanne and Smith, Sydney

Town Is by the Sea

978 1 4063 7738 5

A story, simply told, with beautifully evocative illustrations; this book is pure delight. It tells of a day in the life of a small boy growing up in a seaside mining village where generations have toiled under the sea, digging for coal. It is unpretentious, without sensationalism or pity. Sydney Smith captures the atmosphere of the day from early morning to bedtime with colours reflecting the boy’s carefree existence of sunshine, sand and sea and his understanding of the darker dangers of his father’s life as a miner, under the sea bed.

The drawings, reminiscent in part of Lowry, are uncomplicated and moving. In just a few strokes he depicts the tender relationships between the family members and the simple pleasures of growing up by the sea. The hug between father and son on his return from work really captures their deep affection and relief over his safe homecoming. Joanne Schwartz writes with pared down language which complements the illustrations – any more would distract. The story is told in direct statements beginning with ‘it goes like this...’ There is a tenderness in the matter of fact way the account is told. Each moment of joy, illustrated in bright golds and blues is punctuated with the dark and foreboding understanding that ‘deep down under that sea, my father is digging for coal’ and its inherent dangers. This beautiful picture book is a triumph in complementary text and illustrations. It is not a book for quick skimming. Nor is it light entertainment. It is a thoughtful and tender account of life through the eyes of a small boy whose future is defined by his past. It is one which when shared and talked about will become a firm favourite.

Jane Loder

Schwarz, Viviane

Counting with Tiny Cat

978 1 4063 7102 4

With very few words but an abundance of visual humour this is a counting book with a difference. Tiny Cat of There Are Cats in This Book and There Are No Cats in this Book fame begins the book...
with ‘None’ (looking wide eyed and slightly aggrieved) and we count smoothly up to four before things start to get interesting! After four, Tiny Cat has ‘More’, then ‘Even more’ and then ‘About a dozen’. Though Tiny Cat may have stopped counting young readers will find it hard to resist the temptation to step in and help him as we progress through ‘Lots’, ‘As Many As You Can Get’ and ‘Some Extra’.

Viviane Schwartz’s amazing characterization and bold illustrative style tells a tale of huge emotional scope – it’s a cornucopia of surprise, greed, temptation and finally of contentment as Tiny Cat arrives at ‘Enough’ – all told through a few deft lines which give Tiny Cat his expressions. The book oozes charm and character whilst actually doing some pretty sophisticated work around concepts of number, quantity and pattern recognition. Young readers will immediately grasp the visual humour at work making this a great book for trying to predict what Tiny Cat will do next – one thing’s for certain it will have you laughing out loud!

Lizzie Ryder

**Swales, Roisin**

**Big Hid**

_Flying Eye Books, 2017, pp32, £11.99 978 1 911171 30 0_

This boldly illustrated book for the very young is a debut work by the author. It tells the story of a squirrel and a tortoise who are great friends and who do everything together. They are a great team. They are called Big and Little. They fill their day with chewing stuff, having races, climbing trees until one day Big -the tortoise, doesn’t want to do these things any more. So, he goes off to hide.

Little can’t understand why, and so tries to think of things that would make his friend happy. None of the tactics work, not even with a lovely specially baked cake. Then Little decides that the only thing left is to give Big a big hug and it works. Big is happy again.

Even though there are very few words on each page, the illustrations are large and the message succeeds. Friendship, companionship and overcoming sadness are the overriding themes. Everything can be overcome by giving a big hug.

Janette Perkins

**Todd-Stanton, Joe**

**The Secret of Black Rock**


Erin lives with her mother who is a fisherwoman. Though she longs to go to sea, she is forbidden to do so because of the Black Rock. People say that the rock never stays in one place and is ‘as big as a mountain and as sharp as a swordfish’. One day she stows aboard her mother’s fishing boat and, as the boat swerves suddenly to avoid the Black Rock she is thrown overboard. She then learns the truth about Black Rock and realises she must do everything to save it from people who want it destroyed.

It is good to see a book which depicts a strong, sympathetic female character in a story which will appeal greatly to boys as well as girls. The environmental message is also very welcome. Erin realises that that people must protect what may at first seem strange and threatening. These are the immediate themes of this beautifully constructed modern fairy tale; perhaps the most important thing about _The Secret of Black Rock_ is that it shows how much more rich and exciting life can be if we look beyond the obvious and do not always accept what we are told.

_Jaki Briem_

**Toht, Patricia and Usher, Sam**

**All Aboard the London Bus**

_Frances Lincoln, 2017, pp40, £11.99 978 1 84780 857 8_

This exuberant book takes readers on a remarkable bus tour around London (though there is a brief journey on a tube train for variety). Each famous landmark is depicted by Sam Usher in a detailed architectural style which respects both the building and the reader. However, dashing around these pictures are children and adults who are having a wonderful time as they explore London. The excitement and pleasure on their faces draws the reader into the adventure. The pictures remind us of what we know but so often forget: London is exciting and beautiful.

Patricia Toht’s text is a million miles from that of a typical non-fiction text. Each landmark is described in accessible genres, mostly poetry, though I particularly enjoyed the rather grumpy letter written by Tower Bridge. The vocabulary is well within the range of a young independent reader but as words are combined in original ways which make the subjects bounce off the page. Each text form complements the subject: haikus are perfect for the exhibits at the British Museum and the spectacle of St Paul’s is conveyed beautifully by the elegant, stately verse.

_All Aboard the London Bus_ is one of those wonderful books where everything comes together perfectly – gorgeous!

_Jaki Briem_

**Vere, Ed**

**Grumpy Frog**

_Puffin, 2017, pp32, £6.99 978 0 141 370118_

Grumpy Frog will leap straight off the page and into the hearts of children. He loves the colour green, his own colour, and has little tolerance for other colours. He loves winning. His emotional intelligence, like his colour palette, is also a bit limited, so he rejects the offers of play. The water is too blue for swimming, the trampoline is too yellow for bouncing and his froggy friends are too alarmed by his melt-downs, with the inevitable outcome – poor Grumpy Frog is left all alone, on his green log, to contemplate his predicament. Even in extremis, Grumpy Frog rejects the offer of friendship from Pink Rabbit, because she is, well, pink.

The use of colour flashes and typeface allows the author to speak directly to the reader, and sometimes to Grumpy Frog. The frog replies in bold, black, handwritten text, with lots of useful underlining to convey his feelings. Ed Vere’s vibrant painting can suggest the frogs’ expression and movement with a minimum of strokes, and Grumpy Frog’s tantrum in a wild squiggle of red paint.

The book is full of surprises for young readers. They will be alarmed and delighted by the offer of friendship from a huge, but green, crocodile, and when the inevitable happens again, Frog is plunged into the black reality of the inside of the crocodile’s mouth to recall his good manners and think up a new plan. They will love Pink Rabbit’s opportunity to stamp her foot, too. But don’t imagine that Grumpy Frog is a reformed character – this frog is unsquashable. And whatever you do, don’t call him grumpy.

This is a lovely book which will appeal to adults and children alike, especially if they have ever felt a bit grumpy.

_Chris Lockwood_

**Wechterowicz, Przemyslaw and Dziubak, Emilia**

**Hug Me, Please!**

_Words & Pictures, 2017, pp32, £11.99 978 1 78493 775 1_

The book is all about the positive outcomes of hugging. As a result of having a feel of warm honey, Daddy Bear and Little Bear have a warm feeling on the inside. That’s when they decide to hug someone so that they too can experience that warm feeling inside. Mr Beaver is the first one to benefit from a hug, then Miss Weasel, the Hares and so on, everyone they meet through the forest, even Ms Anaconda. After hugging nearly everyone, they’ve forgotten to hug each other! So they do in a hugely huggable way.

This really is such a feel-good book, it even opens with a picture of the sun brushing its teeth! Then the bears go to find honey and then that warm feeling starts to spread. The illustrations are stunning, they make you feel like you’ve had a hug yourself! A lovely book to have at home, especially for bedtime reading, and a great book to have in the classroom.

Janette Perkins
Allen, Scott  
**Llama United**  
Illustrated by Sarah Horne  
978 1 5098 4090 8  
*Llama United* is a rollicking good read! Tim Gravy’s dad is struggling to make ends meet on the family’s new farm, so when Tim’s new friend Cairo suggests they take on a herd of llamas in order to sell their fur it sounds like a good idea. Tim and Cairo soon discover that these aren’t ordinary llamas – they can play football. Surely football-playing llamas will bring in more money than llama fur, right? So they enlist the help of cantankerous McCloody to coach the llamas into an unbeatable team that quickly rises in the league rankings. But as the llamas near the Cup finals, sabotage threatens to end their winning streak. Will Llama United triumph?  
[Bridget Hamlet](mailto:bridget.hamlet@macmillan.co.uk)  

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Begler, Pete  
**The Fearless Travellers’ Guide to Wicked Places**  
Curious Fox, 2017, pp384, £7.99  
978 1 7820 2595 5  
The novel tells the story of twelve-year-old Nell, who has always felt she could see things others couldn’t. When one day her mother is taken by witches and turned into a bird, Nell and her brothers must journey together to get her back, even though it takes them deep into the so-called Wicked Places, where the Nightmares reside. There they must break the spell and face the witches to make sure the world is a safe place again.  
This is an instantly gripping, lively fantasy adventure; it’s not a slim book but I found myself turning the pages. Any fantasy lovers will enjoy this immensely; although the market seems saturated with middle grade fantasy novels, I do think that there’s room for imaginative, vibrant stories which have the power to transport the reader to a fantastical parallel world. I believe this novel tells one of such stories.  
[Marzena Currie](mailto:marzena.currie@macmillan.co.uk)  

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Bond, Michael  
**Paddington’s Finest Hour**  
Illustrated by R.W. Alley  
978 00 0822619 0  
The cover shows Paddington in his easily recognisable blue duffle coat and red hat, together with his brown case and a pot of marmalade but in this latest novel, Paddington finds himself in several unusual, up-to-date adventures. These include being a competitor on a cookery TV show, having a run in with the police who think he is acting suspiciously and outwitting a hypnotist with his ‘hard stare’. Punctuated with his usual familiar antics of eleveres with Mr Gruber, managing the Brown’s neighbour, Mr Curry, helping Mrs Bird and of course a marmalade sandwich here and there, we have a selection of delightful new tales about this much loved bear from ‘Deepest Darkest Peru’.  
Narrated in his usual candid and matter of fact manner, and enhanced by the pen and ink illustrations depicting Paddington in his various escapades, Michael Bond’s novel will be enjoyed by young and old fans alike, to share or to read again and again. It’s difficult to reconcile the fact that *Paddington’s Finest Hour* is the last collection of Paddington tales that we shall have from the pen of Michael Bond, but how wonderful to have had fifteen super novels, spanning nearly 60 years, about this adorable whimsical world famous bear.  
[Sue Breslin](mailto:sue.breslin@harrap.co.uk)  

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Butchart, Pamela  
**There’s a Werewolf in My Tent! (Baby Aliens)**  
Illustrated by Thomas Flintham  
Nosy Crow, 2017, pp224, £6.99  
978 0 85763 906 6  
Izzy and her friends are very excited to be going on their school camping trip, accompanied by their teacher Miss Jones, and a new teacher, the rather hairy, tall, and a bit terrifying Miss Moon. When the sausages go missing, strange scratches appear and horrifying howling is heard at night, the signs are all pointing firmly to Miss Moon
being not quite what she appears. Despite being considerably older than the target audience myself, I thoroughly enjoyed this book and know my younger self would have loved it even more. This is brilliant, inclusive fiction, sure to go down well with boys and girls, lovers of laughter and lovers of mysteries, certain to soften even reluctant readers as you giggle along with Izzy and friends.

The tone is conversational, the text is broken by illustrations, there's a character for everyone to identify with, and a reassuring resolution for anyone anxious about the fate of our heroes. A great one for reading aloud with a whole class, especially one about to embark on its first residential trip, but equally fun for newly independent readers to discover.

_The Selkie’s Mate_

**Davies, Nicola**

*Illustrated by Claire Jenkins*

_Fabergé, 2017, pp40, £8.99*

978 1 910862 49 0

This is a retelling of one of the old Selkie stories of Scotland — where the seal woman becomes the wife of a land man. This is a delicate story, and in the wrong hands may be experienced as a rape and false imprisonment story. However, here it is sensitively told, with the seal woman choosing to spend time with the crofter after they have sung together under the moon. She offers him her seal skin as a sign of her commitment to him, and asks only that he gives it back when she asks. Sadly he does not respect her trust, despite her asking three times. His conflict and anguish is described, and his hope that she will forget her request. Eventually her children reveal where her skin is, and she is able to return to the sea, never to be human again but making sure she visits them each year. The emphasis on the thoughts behind each of their actions could be used in a discussion about relationships, how people have different expectations and how far do we allow our own needs and wants to dominate relationships.

The illustrations are elegant watercolours, complementing the storytelling. The stand out one for me is of two silhouette heads, placed so that they are almost heart shaped, yet looking in different directions. Pulled together by love, but their outlooks are very different.

_Janet Dowling_

**DePrince, Michaela and DePrince, Elaine**

*Ballerina Dreams*

_illustrated by Ella Okstad_

_Faber & Faber, 2017, pp80, £6.99_

978 0 571 32973 1

This is a classic rags to riches true story of an orphan girl who longs to be a ballerina and through a series of opportunities sees her dream come true. Written by the author (the ballerina in the story), with her adoptive mother — it tells of a little orphaned girl living in an orphanage, one of 27 other children in war torn Sierra Leone, abandoned and abused. She also has a skin condition called vitiligo, where some of the skin loses its colour. ‘I have white spots on my brown skin’. At the age of 4, she found a picture of a dancer on the front cover of a magazine that had been blown almost at her feet. In the picture, the dancer wore a short pink dress that stuck out in a circle around her, she had pointed shoes and she looked very happy. From that moment on Michaela longed to be a famous ballerina. Adopted by Elaine DePrince and taken to America. Michaela never forgot about the photograph of the dancer and decided to make her dream of becoming a ballerina come true. She ended up as principal dancer in New York and now dances for the Dutch National Ballet in Amsterdam, and recently performed with the English National Ballet. When children ask her how to make a personal dream come true she tells them ‘It doesn’t matter if you dream of being a doctor, teacher, writer or a ballerina. Every dream begins with one step. After that you must work hard and practice every day. If you never give up, your dream will come true’.

It is a small pocket-sized book, beautifully illustrated, but it has gigantic messages to send out. It gives hope and inspiration, dreams can come true with perseverance and determination. Love and kindness also play a large part in Michaela’s success too, which she never loses sight of. Although primarily a ballet story for girls, the messages behind the story are universal.

_Janette Perkins_

**Doherty, Berlie**

*Blue John (Little Gems)*

_Barrington Stoke, 2017, pp96, £6.99*

978 1 7811 2578 6

A delightful, immaculately illustrated novella for newly independent readers, _Blue John_ owes a little to the Orpheus legend and a lot to fine story telling. The eponymous Blue John is created deep in the earth among the rocks by his possessive and powerful mother, the Queen of Darkness. And he must stay with her for ever. Inevitably he is drawn towards the light by the sound of children playing which leads to an adventure and a happy, if rueful, ending of sorts. Doherty’s elegant prose is fluidly poetic: ‘the watery ripple of the skylark’ and ‘the skidding and sprawling, crawling and tumbling as his footsteps chimed like bells.’ The illustrations, often on a dark background are a very attractive complement — it works integrally as a fine sonata for, say violin and piano does. The book is also nice to hold and the right size for juvenile hands — Little Gem indeed.

_Susan Elkin_
Donoghue, Emma

The Lotterys Plus One

Macmillan, 2017, pp320, £10.99
978 1 0098 0319 4

This is the first title in a new series by acclaimed author of Room, Emma Donoghue. In this vibrant novel we are introduced to the diverse and lively family called the Lotterys – so named because a lottery win is how they manage to fund their idyllic and effervescent lifestyle. With two mums, two dads, seven children and various pets the Lotterys’ house is bursting at the seams. So when PopCorn’s tankanorous and old-fashioned father becomes ill with dementia and needs a home, it’s up to the Lotterys to make a space for him – and nine-year-old Sumac appears to bear the brunt of it, having to give up her beloved room. Sumac and the rest of the family quickly learn that making a space for someone as outspoken as ‘Grumps’ in your house is much more difficult, especially when he really doesn’t want to be there in the first place.

There are many things to admire about The Lotterys Plus One – its positive depiction of diverse ages, backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities, life choices, diets, occupations, approaches to education, to name a few. The illustrations were not only endearing, but they also served an important purpose in aiding the reader to distinguish between so many characters and settings. Although I really enjoyed the misadventures of Sumac and the heart of a loving family beating at the centre of this book, I must say I found it so crowded with issues, forced family nicknames for everything and an overly idealised household that I found myself sympathising with Grumps perhaps more than Donoghue intended. I wonder if many of the children I meet would be able to really identify with Sumac and the other Lottery children as they would have so little in common with any of them.

Having said that, I couldn’t put it down as I truly wanted to know how they resolved the dilemma with Grumps, and it is refreshing to read a novel at a KS2 level which is challenging both conceptually and linguistically.

Bridget Hamlet

Donohoe, Helen

Birdy Flynn

Rock the Boat, 2017, pp384, £7.99
978 1 78074 939 6

In this debut novel, Helen Donohoe takes us back to the turbulent 1970s with the Irish cause and bombs in England being a constant background feature. Birdy, who has an Irish mother, is growing up in a world of secrets which gradually emerge as the narrative develops. The setting of Birdy Flynn is created with very deft detail, particularly in the cadences of extended dialogue which are so important in moving the plot forward. Details of clothes, music and food also help show the ways in which Birdy struggles to fit in to a society with rigid expectations and conventions.

Birdy is a compelling character with all the feelings and concerns of everyone on the brink of puberty. Every event in this rich narrative is seen through Birdy’s eyes and everything is convincing, original and brave. Leaving childhood behind Birdy moves into a world where there are no easy answers and very little is predictable. Helen Donohoe writes with a warmth, empathy and clarity which draws readers into the world she has created. There is plenty of humour and incident to engage young readers while the events and issues, though drawn from a previous generation, are relevant and important in the contemporary world.

Jaki Brien

Dowd, Siobhan

The Pavee and the Buffer Girl

978 1 911370 04 8

Jim Curran is a teenage traveller, whose family has halted at the town of Dundray. The local authorities have forced him and his fellow young travellers to attend school and on his first day, Jim’s Mam asks him to try and get a few ‘words of reading’ off them if he can. But the school lives up to Jim’s fears and proves to be a hostile place for the ‘Pavees’ where day to day survival takes precedence over any wish to learn. Jim and the others are bullied, called names and suffer prejudice and violence at the hands of the local teenagers – ‘Buffers’ as the travellers call them. All except for one girl, Kit, who despite having troubles of her own, befriends Jim and not only tries to teach him to read but helps him to find some peace in Dundray.

Then, just when things seem to be calming down, the youngest and weakest member of the Pavees is set upon in school. This together with eviction notices back at the camp, force the men of the travelling family to meet to decide what to do. Should they move on again, escaping from the injustices they have been accused of or should they stay and stand up for their rights?

This is a very moving story which is unfortunately, based on many a true story. The writer tells it as it is, showing a real empathy for the Pavees but also an understanding of the pre and ill-conceived ideas that ‘Buffers’ have about travellers their life style and their moral code. Brought to vivid life in stunning ink-and-wash artwork, the story of Kit and Jim although set in Ireland, could be anywhere.

Sue Breslin
Autumn highlights for libraries from Usborne

Brilliant fiction
Thought provoking books for middle grade to YA readers

Lift-the-flap non fiction
Internationally bestselling books for 6+ readers
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Be the first to hear about exciting new Usborne titles, visit www.usborne.com/libraries to sign up to our exclusive librarians’ newsletter
bone-scutters and beast-chatterers, night-time is moonrise – it is indeed another world, skilfully brought to life. Illustrations on the edges of pages (among other places) are matched by chapter headings in copperplate writing like that on treasure maps, and Joe McLaren’s fishy, wavy cover is lovely: it all comes together and this book is definitely recommended.

Diana Barnes

Earls, Phil
Super Dad's Day Off (Little Gems)
Barrington Stoke, 2017, pp96, £6.99
978 1 78112 684 4

Another stunning book in the Little Gems series from Barrington Stoke. Similar to the other books in the series, the glossy cover has fold-in flaps under which here are superhero jokes and a mini quiz to find out what kind of superhero you are.

As we all know, superheroes need a day off occasionally and Stanley’s dad Dynamo Dan is no exception. Wanting to spend some quality time together Stanley and his dad head for the local park – but wait, what’s this? On the way, they see a lady whose cat is stuck up a tree. It turns out that the cat is a panther, but wanting to give his dad a rest, Stanley springs into action, giving the panther a piggy-back down the tree. But it’s not long before there’s another emergency and then another! And, while his father rests, Stanley saves the day. However, it’s not until the press gather to photograph him rather than his super hero dad. But wait… what’s that? Earth is being invaded. The pair fly off to save the world, Dynamo Dan and his son Super Stan.

Earls has created a lively and fun story to appeal to the super hero in everyone. Enhanced by the humorous cartoon drawings from Steve May, it’s a great easy to read story for even the most reluctant reader.

Elizabeth Baskeyfield

Evans, Maz
Who Let the Gods Out?
Illustrated by Alexie Bitskoff
Chicken House, 2017, pp368, £6.99
978 1 910655 41 2

Chicken House love to publish unusual, quirky and just plain funny books. The books are always of the highest quality writing and this is no exception. Children love history, they love to learn about stories from the ancient past and in this book not only will they begin to learn about the gods (and goddesses) of ancient Greece, they will meet them in a rather unusual circumstances.

Elliot lives on earth in the 21st century, with his mum who we gradually understand to be unwell. Whilst he is coping with her care he is not quite sure how he can manage to prevent the house, their home, from being taken away and a greedy neighbour from doing just that.

Cue a shooting star crashing to earth and changing his life forever, once he discovers that the star is actually a Zodiac goddess and on a very important mission. Soon to come will be a wicked death demon, a few more gods, a spattering of friends and a brilliant laugh-out-loud adventure complete with brilliant puns and making this a book not just for children!

Louise Ellis-Barrett

Fayers, Claire
Voyage to Magical North
Journey to Dragon Island
(The Accidental Pirates) Macmillan, £6.99
978 1 4472 9060 5 / 978 1 4472 9062 9

Abandoned as a child, Brine Seabone has spent her life as a lowly servant for an irritable magician and his obnoxious apprentice. That is until the day she runs away to sea and is captured by the legendary pirate ship the Onion and its pirate captain Cassie O’Pia. The pirates are on a quest to find Magical North, a place so mythical that most people doubt its existence. Her magician friend Peter and former librarian Tom’s lives have been turned upside down as the adventures begin. Along the way, Brine is hoping she will find out the identity of her parents and why they left her alone in the first place. It is a pirate adventure with magic all the way through it and threats and dangers around every corner. It has a language of its own, colourful characters, like Marfak West the evil magician, Cassie the captain, Trudi the onboard cook, who concocts wonderful dishes like ‘Tentacle and Rum Stew’, there are fishbirds with flippers and bears, ice and whales.

The sequel follows on the adventure with the three main characters as before trying to find a family for their fire-breathing friend the dragon (whom they accidentally hatched in the previous book) still on board the pirate ship. They are also hoping to unravel the secrets of Brine’s mysterious past. So, the motley crew in the Onion set sail to find the mysterious Western Island and its floating castle, where legend maintains there are dragons. A must read for boys and girls of 8–10, with some challenging language. This series is a really good pirate read!

Janette Perkins

French, Vivian
The Cherry Pie Princess
Illustrated by Marta Kissi
Walker, 2017, pp192, £5.99
978 1 4063 6897 0

Princess Peny is not like her sisters. She loves libraries, and books, and baking. She is mortified to discover that by borrowing a book she has caused the librarian’s arrest and imprisonment, and meanwhile the selfish actions of her family are in danger of bringing about their downfall. Only a princess with courage, ingenuity and exceptional kitchen skills can save them, if only she can save herself first. Obviously the way to a librarian’s heart is with a book about libraries, but despite a very promising start, the story veered off to be mainly about looks and dresses for a few chapters. About halfway through it found its way again and turned the genre on its head, with a fun and gripping re-telling of Sleeping Beauty. I felt that this was an author desperate to buck the trend but afraid to abandon pretty things and princesses altogether. As a result, the girliest of girls are bound to get sucked in, and if the less girly can have a bit of patience too, they’ll find at its heart a heroine worth reading about. By the end, you might even have the boys on board too for an action-packed finale of nastardly villainy and daring stunts.

Andrea Reitan

Gibbons, Alan
The Beautiful Game
Illustrated by Chris Chalik
Barrington Stoke, 2017, pp80, £5.99
978 1 78112 2691 2

Released to coincide with the 28th anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster, the author has succeeded in weaving a mostly credible tale of three generations of Liverpool fans understanding the terrible events of 15 April 1989, with interesting facts about some of football’s darker historical moments inserted throughout the text.

Both the long-standing, and sometimes bitter rivalry between the red teams at either end of the East Lancs Road, and the racial prejudice accepted as the norm in the 1960’s and 70’s are explored in some detail, and the sub plot of the perils of working as a fire fighter is also brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

Chalik’s illustrations enhance the settings of realistic family life, and perhaps only Alan Gibbons – who has a foot in both Manchester and Liverpool’s tight-knit communities – could have written such a well-rounded and informative short story. Highly recommended for reluctant readers and football addicts alike.

Stephen King

Gregory, Lorraine
Mold and the Poison Plot
978 0 19 274582 8

Mold had been dumped in a rubbish bin as a baby and if it had not been for ‘Old Aggy’ he would have remained there, due to his odd looks and especially his very long nose. Mold is a totally
engaging character who has an incredibly heightened sense of smell, something that will eventually provide the key to his own background. His world comes crashing down when Aggy is arrested for trying to poison the king and it is up to him and some unusual friends to find the real poisoner and also the truth behind his own history.

This is a great adventure story with magic and fantastic creatures. There is political intrigue and social inequality, all of which are being stirred up by a suitably nasty set of villains. It is about communities living together and not judging people by their looks but it is also a fantasy set in a world that bears only a small relation to a medieval world that we might understand. The author has created a world that we totally accept and the young readers will be able to understand the various themes that underlie the story. This is a great tale for those in KS2.

Margaret Pemberton

Hanlon, Abby
Dory Fantasmagory
Faber & Faber, 2017, pp160, £6.99
978 0 571 32558 0

Dory is the youngest of three children who lives in a world where reality and imagination merge. Self-assured, mischievous, and prone to the odd tantrum, Dory is likely to remind many young readers of their own siblings – if not themselves! He has to earn the stripes of empathy and emotional resilience in order to keep the feelings in balance. He knows. The arrival of an officious government appointed organiser, Mr Zamora, changes everything. It is decreed that those who are ‘clean’ or Samo will be segregated to live in a different settlement on the island of Coran.

Rapidly after this devastating development Amihan finds herself in an institution, an orphanage, away from her beloved Nanay. She does meet a friend there, Mari is an elusive sort of girl who has an affinity with butterflies. Adults are portrayed as helpless, even those sympathetic people who might oppose things are relatively powerless in the face of the obsessive Zamora. He is himself a lepidopterist but with the Victorian age values of seek and kill to preserve and study, the children of course relish the fleeting fluttering freedom of live butterflies. Amihan and Mari plot an escape but all is not as they anticipate on Culian.

This story is an emotional roller-coaster which tugs at the tear ducts. Whilst it is a book for children it is also a book touching some serious themes covering the careless inhumanity of some seemingly logical practises. Parallels include effects of the forced child migration policies of the UK as well as the separation from parents of native youngsters in both Australia and Canada. In this book the pace of the writing and the strength of the characterisation bring the fictional situation to life so that the narrative force never slackens.

Chris Brown

Knowles, Alison
Ollie and the Magic Workshop
978 1 78592 241 1

This is a delightful book, full of good humour and advice, with evocative illustrations in primary colours. It is the third book in a series, but you do not need to have read the previous ones to enjoy this one. It is written by a therapist to introduce the idea of feelings and emotions as individual ‘superpowers’ which respond to situations, but which are overseen by a captain (the child) who has to earn the stripes of empathy and emotional resilience in order to keep the feelings in balance. In this book, Ollie has already identified his superpowers and is aware of how they grow or shrink according to his perception of them. The magic workshop is where his suit of armour for resilience is being made. He has to earn it through facing certain challenges. Some of the challenges he fails at the first attempt but develops the courage and understanding to persevere. Along the way he develops his first stripe of empathy (gained in a previous book) by helping and supporting another girl to become aware of her superpowers.

It is aimed at children to learn about themselves, encouraging them to identify their own superpowers, and at adults who may be helping and supporting them. It would be very useful for classroom discussion as well as for individual children. It is aimed at 7-11 year olds, but I think it has value in the teenage classroom too.

Janet Dowling

Hargrave, Kiran Millwood
The Island at the End of Everything
Chicken House, 2017, pp244, £6.99
978 1 910002 76 6

The setting is an isolated community and is based on historical truth, from 1906 until 1988 the Philippine island of Culian was used in an effort to contain leprosy.

The story is set in the early 1900s through the eyes of a young girl, Amihan, who lives on Culian with her mother, her Nanay. She does not herself have the disease although her mother is a disfigured sufferer but this, for a child, is her normal, it is a loving home and all she knows. The arrival of an officious government appointed organiser, Mr Zamora, changes everything. It is decreed that those who are ‘clean’ or Samo will be segregated to live in a different settlement on the island of Coran.

In the summer of 1727 a group of men and boys, there to harvest birds and eggs, were stranded on Warrior Stac, a pinnacle of rock that pitches out of the Atlantic, ‘as black and fearful as one horn of the Devil himself’. No one returns to collect them. Why? Surely nothing but the end of the world can explain why they have been abandoned to endure storms, starvation and terror. And how can they survive, imprisoned on every side by the ocean?

Geraldine McCaughrean has taken these bare facts and imagined the story of those terrible
months and the characters of those who endured them. It is a mesmerising story of survival full of unexpected twists; completely original and beautifully written.

Elizabeth McDonald

Metaphrog

The Little Mermaid

NBM/Papercutz, 2017, pp80, £12.99

978 1 6299 1739 9

This graphic novel version of Hans Christian Andersen’s well-known tale is presented in a small square book with board covers and a burgundy cloth spine. The sumptuous jewel-like colours flood the pages, starting with translucent emerald, turquoise and blues to suggest the underwater world, followed by the gold, bronze and browns of the scenes set on land, and ending with a darker more sombre palette for the conclusion. The text captures the essence of the original story while the delicately drawn illustrations highlight its emotional content.

Created by award-winning graphic novelists John Chalmers and Sandra Marrs, this is a romantic story, tinged with sadness, and without the nearly tied up happy ending some might be expecting. As such, this makes the ideal antidote for the Disney version that many younger readers will be much more familiar with.

Chris Routh

Moorhouse, Tom

The New Adventures of Mr Toad: A Race for Toad Hall

Illustrated by Holly Swain


978 0 19274673 3

Following in the wake of his picture book version of Wind in the Willows (The Adventures of Mr Toad, illustrated by David Roberts), Tom Moorhouse now brings the character into the 21st century. The reader does not need to be familiar with Kenneth Grahame’s original novel, but having some knowledge of what’s gone before will undoubtedly add to the enjoyment of this, the first in a new series set one hundred years later.

While exploring the grounds of Toad Hall, young friends Teejay, Mo and Ratty discover a secret tunnel which leads them to the underground ice house where they find Mr Toad preserved in cold storage! Defrosted and dangerous (particularly when driving), Toad sets out to stop the weasels from taking over and developing his beloved home.

This is a fast paced, entertaining adventure with lots of (corny) word play and poop poops, ideal for reading aloud or for young readers building stamina. With the introduction of Teejay, a feisty female toad, and Ms Badger, the youngsters’ kindly companion, the original all-male cast has been deftly adapted to suit a modern day audience. Holly Swain’s predominantly green illustrations work perfectly with the text, creating a sense of place, adding visual humour and bringing the characters to life. Look out for the second adventure in the series, Toad Hall in Lockdown.

Chris Routh

Nadin, Joanna

The Incredible Billy Wild

Little, Brown, 2017, pp240, £6.99

978 1 5102 0125 5

In a series of letters addressed to God, Billy Wild tells his story. He is growing up with his widowed father and his two brothers, frequently cared for by their two grandmothers and family friends.

The boys are a handful. Their father is a midwife, about to go on strike, but needing the money so badly he continues to work. He can barely hold his family and his job together. He is frequently desperate.

Before she dies, Billy remembers his mother calling him The Incredible Billy Wild and these words are what give Billy his self-belief. When he discovers a starving and abandoned greyhound hiding in the battered shed at the end of the garden, Billy is determined to keep it. He is well aware that his father and grandmother will be totally against the idea, but with the help of his friend Paris, and his two brothers, Billy manages to find food for the animal and keep it alive. The most extraordinary thing about the dog, called Dog, is that it can sing!

There are moments of great humour and also great pathos. The small, tight knit, self-sufficient community is deftly described. In a wonderful finale, slightly reminiscent of The Full Monty, but without the striptease, Billy’s secret is revealed. This is a story with a very happy and satisfying ending and we all need these, don’t we? Thank you Joanna Nadin.

Clare Mopurgo

Nicholls, Sally

All About Ella (Little Gems)

Barrington Stoke, 2017, pp96, £6.99

978 1 78112 533 5

Ella’s brother Sam is very ill and Ella feels that nobody cares about her. The thread that holds the story together is the rhyme beginning ‘Mondays child is fair of face…’ Ella is not happy because her family do not know what day she was born. She feels resentment because her brother is ill and so, in her opinion, he is allowed to do what he likes. This prompts an outburst: ‘I hate him… I wish he was dead.’ When her mum doesn’t turn up to collect her from school on Thursday because her brother is in hospital, Ella realises she does care about him after all. The final chapter is Sunday: Sam is well enough to go home. The family celebrate being reunited with a bizarre indoor picnic comprising everything they could find ranging from frozen peas to cornflakes.

This story is sensitively told and children will relate to Ella’s feelings: this will be especially poignant where children have a seriously ill sibling or other close relative. As ever with Barrington Stoke’s Little Gems, the book is printed on good quality cream paper and there are endpapers with more activities. Hannah Coulson’s delicate illustrations capture the mood of the story. This is a highly recommended, thought-provoking book for newly confident readers.

Mary Crawford

Nix, Garth

Frogkisser!: A Magical Romp of a Fairytale

Piccadilly, 2017, pp384, £10.99

978 1 8481 2601 5

The tiny kingdom of Trollonia is ruled by Princess Anya’s stepfather, the evil, cackling sorcerer, Rikard. He has a penchant for transmogrification, but Anya’s elder sister won’t give the latest prince to be turned into a frog a true love’s kiss which will return him to his human shape. Anya embarks on a quest to gather the ingredients of the Transmogrification Reversal Lip Balm which will enable her to become a frogkisser and return life to normal. As in all the best quests Anya gradually changes her views and becomes ready to fight for the people and creatures of her land.

Frogkisser is a delight because Garth Nix transmogrifies the conventional fairytale into something contemporary and thought-provoking without losing any of its excitement and reassuring structure. There is no sense of parody in this book, just a good polishing of the tarnished magic lamp to create something gleaming and powerful. The characters are engaging and surprising as they develop through the fast-moving narrative. There is in the story-telling and settings as well as characters an assured balance of predictable and bizarre which will both support and delight readers. This is certainly a book to recommend to a broad range of young readers – if you can bear to let it out of your hands.

Jaki Brien
From the best-selling and award-winning author of *Sky Hawk*

GILL LEWIS

An uplifting story of friendship, hope, and finding the courage to fight for what you believe in

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@OUPChildrens
O’Brien, Claire
The Terrifying Teacher (Race Further with Reading)
Illustrated by Santy Gutierrez
Franklin Watts, 2017, pp48, £8.99
978 1 4451 4999 8
‘There is something different about our new teacher, Mr Bloodaxe’

This was probably fairly apparent when Mr Bloodaxe arrived on Moon Day in a Viking longboat that he had rowed up the canal. The new teacher then set about teaching the class how to be Vikings which went down better with some than others. Alastair was so excited he was condemned to sit the week out in the book corner but without books because Mr Bloodaxe had destroyed them. The focus of lessons was to make the children stronger and tougher so they could go on a Viking raid. No doubt in Viking times children would have to learn these skills.

This is a fun way to learn about the Viking way of life and the juxtaposition of our culture with that of the Vikings may encourage us to consider our own priorities slightly differently. The colourful, witty illustrations again contrast the bloodthirsty teacher with the modern-day children who seem anaemic by comparison.

The book is divided into five chapters: the Viking names for the days of the week concluding on Freya’s Day with the arrival of a fearsome-looking new teacher, Captain Hook. If other books in the series are up to the standard of The Terrifying Teacher, they will be highly motivating for developing readers.

Mary Crawford

Peers, Bobbie
Translated by Tara Chase
William Weston and the Luridium Thief
978 1 4063 7170 3

Bobbie Peers is Norwegian, and this book was initially published in Norwegian. The film rights have already been sold. An exciting tale about a boy whose family are in hiding in Norway, following the disappearance of their Grandfather, and who have changed their name to hide their identities.

William, the teenage hero has an exceptional talent as a codebreaker, and when he wins a competition, he is recruited to join an elite codebreaking school in Britain. The story is fast and furious, with hidden crypts under London stations, and robots of every kind. Ideal for fans of Alex Rider stories, of all ages.

Alison A. Maxwell-Cox

Peters, Helen
Evie’s Ghost
Nosy Crow, 2017, pp304, £6.99
978 0 85763 842 7

The author has created an extraordinary saga which will hold the reader spellbound from beginning to end. As always, in her inimitable way, Helen Peters brings her characters to life. It is a story for everyone and will open eyes and hearts.

Evie Tregaron goes to stay, rather unwillingly, with Anna, her godmother who she does not remember, while her mother goes off to Venice on honeymoon with her new husband. Evie finds her godmother very scruffy and extremely eccentric. Anna lives in a flat in a converted mansion in the countryside. The first hint of the mystery to come is when Evie finds strange words scratched in the pane of glass of her bedroom window, dated 27th April 1814. As the story unravels the reader is drawn into the lives of the family and their servants living in the house. In the early nineteenth century. Helen Peters loves theatre and this story is full of drama.

The author has researched the period meticulously and brings the times alive in a way which is both intriguing and thought provoking. The issues of child labour, slavery, our modern perceptions of human rights and universal literacy are all there. The influential writers of the time, William Blake, Charles Dickens and Charles Kingsley are subtly introduced. Despite the seriousness of the subject, the book remains exciting and extremely readable. There is never a dull moment. This is a book to put in the hands of as many children as possible.

Clare Morpurgo

Pirotta, Saviour
Mark of the Cyclops: An Ancient Greek Mystery (Flashbacks)
978 1 4729 3414 7

A book to read aloud to Years 1, 2, 3, and 4 or a bridging book for readers becoming independent at KS1 or early KS2. It offers large print with 24 short chapters, black and white line drawings, with a Contents page, a useful list of Greek gods at the end, and a glossary with explanations of the Greek terms used in the text. As well as introducing the reader to a handful of Greek words, it also gives a wonderful insight into life in Ancient Greece – home life, eating habits, markets, religious life, symposiums, wedding celebrations, the role of women, the life of slaves and scibes.

The story is set in the household of Master Lykos and his son Ariston, who is a professional poet and lyre player, the two leading characters being a young slave, Thrax, and a young scribe, Nico, from farming stock on the island of Kos. The two bright young lads journey from Athens to Corinth with Master Ariston when he is engaged to entertain guests at an important wedding. You would not anticipate the hazards that befall them on the journey, but they turn out to be nothing in comparison with the troubles they encounter at their journey’s end. It is in effect a sort of ‘whodunit’ for young children and keeps you guessing until the very end. A rattling good tale and a very happy ending, of course, given the age range it is intended for, though perhaps a more modern take than I would have expected of the classical Greek era!

Angela Redfern

Pounder, Sibéal
Bad Mermaids
Illustrated by Jason Cockcroft
Bloomsbury, 2017, pp272, £5.99
978 1 4088 7712 8

Beattie, Mimi and Zelda are on land having a holiday from their underwater world when they get a strange Crabagram from Arabella Cod, queen of the mermaids. They are instructed to return home to solve the mystery and save their leader who has been fishnapped. This is Sibéal Pounder’s new series following on from her success with Witch Wars. The mermaid heroines have to make their way around the Hidden Lagoon to establish the ablis or lies of the SHOAL mermaids, rulers of Swirlshell, Hammerhead Heights, Oysterdale, Anchor Rock and Lobstertown. The heroines dash between the realms in a sporty clam car accompanied and aided by Beattie’s pet talking seahorse, Steve, who lives in a set of false teeth.

The story is interspersed by information panels from Clamzine and The Scribbled Squid. Illustrations by Jason Cockcroft add a dash of magic to the pages of text. This will appeal to any young reader who likes their mermaid tales to be have a stylish sense of fashion, with piranha-print nail polish and Curly Clips coiffures.

Wendy Worley

Rundell, Katherine
The Explorer
Illustrated by Hannah Horn
Bloomsbury, 2017, pp416, £12.99
978 1 4088 5487 7

Katherine Rundell, in her latest novel, crashes her Explorer, a boat named Lobstertown, into a coastal line of cliffs. Kaelin, a young mermaid, is washed up and the children on board discover her and her family story. The story is set in the household of Master Lykos and his son Ariston, who is a professional poet and lyre player, the two leading characters being a young slave, Thrax, and a young scribe, Nico, from farming stock on the island of Kos. The two bright young lads journey from Athens to Corinth with Master Ariston when he is engaged to entertain guests at an important wedding. You would not anticipate the hazards that befall them on the journey, but they turn out to be nothing in comparison with the troubles they encounter at their journey’s end. It is in effect a sort of ‘whodunit’ for young children and keeps you guessing until the very end. A rattling good tale and a very happy ending, of course, given the age range it is intended for, though perhaps a more modern take than I would have expected of the classical Greek era!

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Wendy Worley
The author cleverly leaves her readers slightly disorientated; we do not know exactly when these events are taking place, or how old the three older children are. Perhaps they are young teenagers; Fred, who dreams of becoming a famous explorer, longs to impress his distant father by his bravery; Con, stiff and unlovely, has to learn to adapt to the needs of the others; and Lila carries the constant responsibility for getting her brother home safely to her scientist parents. Their attempts to work together, to agree on and execute a plan, to support each other when they are frightened are sympathetically but realistically portrayed.

This is no ‘Famous Five’ adventure; the terror, the hunger and the danger are all real, and the sense of peril from the children’s predicament is constant. Nor, when the children find ‘The Explorer’ of the title, are we treated to an easy happy ending with a brave adult ready to save the day. This adult is complex and dangerous; from him, the children learn not only some skills they need to survive but also some lessons about the fragility of the planet and their responsibility to protect it and all of the people who live on it. He refuses, ferociously, to offer them easy answers, but he does unite them into a powerful team.

This book is a ‘must-read’. It has an enthralling plot, brilliant originality in its use of language and for the four children and the reader, a very satisfactory ending.

Chris Lockwood

Savage, Melissa

Bigfoot, Tobin & Me

Chicken House, 2017, pp304, £6.99 978 1 9107 718 3

This a story about loss and sadness, but also about the healing powers of love and friendship. Although there is a strong message it does not overwhelm the writing, which is full of humour and the joys of life. The pleasures of eating play a large role in the story and there is a glossary of ‘delicious things to eat’. Many of the ingredients will be new to a European readership but give the book its charm and character.

Lemonade Liberty Witt is being driven away from her home in San Francisco towards the little town of Willow Creek. Lemonade is not happy. She is grieving the loss of her mother. She is leaving her home, her friends, her school, her favourite teacher and all that she loves, to go and stay in this little town in the middle of nowhere where she knows no one. She is close to tears when her social worker tells she will have to stay in Willow Creek until other arrangements can be made for her. When she meets Charlie, the elderly man who is to look after her, Lemonade is still not happy and when she is introduced to Tobin, a little boy younger than her, she is not impressed.

Tobin lives with his mother, his father having not returned from the war in Vietnam. He invites Lemonade to join Bigfoot Detective Inc as his assistant and reluctantly she agrees. Tobin’s enthusiasm for Bigfoot is infectious and despite herself Lemonade is drawn into his quest and in this way begins to meet other members of the tiny community. Slowly but surely Lemonade begins to feel that she belongs. She discovers that her dead mother had grown up in the little town, that Charlie is really her grandfather and her next of kin. And when Tobin’s missing father miraculously reappears, she finds that she can rejoice in Tobin’s new found happiness despite her own sadness.

Readers will enjoy this many layered story, set in a different country, in a different culture, in a different time, but with so many recognisable similarities. It is a story which deserves to be read more than once!

Clare Morpurgo

Sepúlveda, Luis

Translated by Nick Caistor

The Story of a Snail Who Discovered the Importance of Being Slow (Alma Junior)

Illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura


This short novel tells the story of a snail called Rebelde, who’s determined to find the answer to a question that has been haunting him for ages – ‘why are the snails so slow?’ He then decides to travel the world to find that answer, while making friends and learning many other things on the way. His journey takes a new course when he finds out that his friends are in danger and he must rush (!) home to warn them.

This is a phenomenally wonderful story that immediately made me think of literary gems created by Aesop or Jean de La Fontaine – in the prose form. Rebelde is such an endearing little character and his natural curiosity and courage – also to accept that he’s different – is beautifully depicted and his story flows so flawlessly and engagingly that you find yourself reaching the end of his journey before you know it (it helps that it is such a short book, admittedly). It’s an incredible book, a modern classic for any age group, and I know I’ll be presenting it to many of my family and friends, children and adults alike. At the time when publishing is often overwhelmed by commercial fiction of sometimes questionable quality, this is a true gem that can be used as an example of what quality storytelling should be about.

Marzena Currie

Stevens, Robin

The Guggenheim Mystery

Puffin, 2017, pp320, £9.99 978 0 141 37702 5

Ted Spark is different. His brain is wired up differently to everyone else and he wears his school uniform every day, even when he heads to New York with Mum and Kat to visit Aunt Gloria and cousin Salim. Three months ago Ted solved the mystery of how Salim disappeared from a pod on the London Eye. Since then Salim has moved to New York with his mum, Aunt Gloria, who has taken up a new job as a curator at the Guggenheim Museum. Ted and his sister, Kat, are pleased to see Salim again and looking forward to discovering New York. However, their first trip out is a visit to the Guggenheim, while it is closed, courtesy of Aunt Gloria. The museum fills with smoke and is evacuated and as the smoke disperses it becomes clear that a Kandinsky painting worth millions of pounds has been stolen. Ted can’t see the point in paintings so is unconcerned until the police decide that Aunt Gloria must be responsible for the theft. Ted, Kat and Salim set out to prove her innocence and find the painting. Ted’s unusual view of the world allows him to see things in a different way to Kat and Salim and the three of them make a formidable team.

Robin Stevens has managed to capture the very essence of Siobhan Dowd’s characters and has successfully brought Ted into the centre of another mystery to solve. Like The London Eye Mystery, this story keeps the reader engaged until the final moment. Through many twists and turns, and red herrings, we follow Ted, Kat and Salim as they speculate, gather clues and finally fall upon the truth. A satisfying read and a worthy follow-up to The London Eye Mystery.

Elen Krajewska

Stower, Adam

King Coo


When Ben is being chased by his arch enemy, he hides under a rubbish bin, only to find a tunnel that eventually leads to a hidden garden (or even forest) He is then challenged by a weird small person with a very long beard, who eventually takes Ben to her (yes she says she is a girl) home. However the bullies, led by Monty Grabelle are still in pursuit and the adventure is just beginning.

This is a hilarious and energetic adventure for young readers, a real rollercoaster. It is full of action and a great collection of illustrations, ranging from simple images to comic style layouts; they are just pen and ink sketches but full of character and detail. The readers are very quickly on the side of Ben and Coo and cheer them on in all of their attempts to save the town from the machinations of Monty and his father.
(The Mayor). This really is an excellent story for those just getting to grips with a lot of text and there are enough breaks to make this a enjoyable experience. I hope that we are going to be treated to more adventures from this quirky pair of heroes.

\[\text{Margaret Pemberton}\]

**Tubridy, Ryan and Lynch, P. J.**

**Patrick and the President**


From end paper to end paper this book exudes quality. The book is set in Ireland in 1963 and tells the story of President Kennedy’s famous return to his ancestral home through the eyes of a young local boy named Patrick. The entire New Ross community is bubbling with anticipation and preparation for JFK’s visit, but Patrick has even more reason to be giddy with the hope of actually meeting ‘Himself’ – he gets to help serve cakes at the president’s tea party in Dungarstown.

Warmth and life are breathed into this simple tale through Lynch’s romantic watercolour illustrations and Tubridy’s charming turns of phrase, unmistakably Irish. When Patrick painstakingly rehearses how to cut a Swiss roll for the president’s party, he gets to help serve cakes at the president’s tea party in Dungarstown.

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**Winick, Judd**

**Hilo: The Boy Who Crashed to Earth**

978 0 141 37692 9

Puffin, 2017, pp208, £7.99

Hilo by Judd Winick is a full-colour new comic book/graphic novel series. Anyone who loves to laugh-out-loud at what they are reading will enjoy this brilliant adventure series about a mysterious boy who crashes to earth with no knowledge of who he is or where he has come from… can he find out who he is, survive a day at school and help his new human friends save the world?

Children will love the full colour graphics in this book and the sparse words, as common to graphic novels, encouraging them to engage with the pictures and find the story for themselves, the beauty of this being that they can change it each time they read. The adventure is fast and furious, there are lots of laughs, some great characterisation and a few well-kept secrets that will reveal themselves as the story unfolds. Great books and a very clever concept for a series that will certainly draw in readers.

\[\text{Louise Ellis-Barrett}\]

**Wolk, Lauren**

**Beyond the Bright Sea**

Corgi, 2017, pp320, £6.99

This is the second novel written by Lauren Wolk and having loved it from its first page to its last, I can’t wait to read her Carnegie shortlisted debut Wolf Hollow.

Crow has lived her whole life on a tiny island with Osh, a gentle recluse of a man, who found her as a baby, only hours old, washed up on the shoreline in an old skiff, and Miss Maggie their neighbour, who lives on a nearby sandbar. Her life is uncomplicated and full of simple pleasures – produce from the garden, fish from the sea, and enough wood to keep warm in the cold winters. There were however mysteries which remained unsolved. Why was her skin the same colour as Osh’s after a long hot summer? Why was it that the villagers stood aside when she was near or shook hands with Miss Maggie but avoided touching her? But then when a fire, burning on the island opposite, raised questions over her birth, Crow’s desire to unpick the truth begins to threaten her and those she holds most dear.

This is a story about a search for a lost identity and its consequences. In unveiling the truth one can sometimes lose sight of what one already holds dear. I found the whole experience of reading this book a delight and one which convinces me that this novel will rapidly become a classic. Wolk is a genius in creating imagery which is hauntingly beautiful, original and vivid. The story unfolds slowly with unsettling revelations of prejudice, alienation, unconditional love and true values. It hooks the reader from the first sentence and it becomes a book difficult to put down. I am struggling to write anything that will do justice to this stunningly well written book. But I would urge all those teachers who still find time to share a class novel to earmark this one as a ‘must read.’

\[\text{Jane Loder}\]

A graphic novel, illustrated with black and white drawings, this book is the continuation of the story that began in Goodbye Marianne. However, it works as a stand-alone conveying the feelings of loneliness, confusion and hostility a child would have felt in these circumstances. The illustrations are similar in style to those of Brian Selznick and convey the story well, adding additional details to the dialogue. The author was born in Berlin and was part of the Kindertransport herself when she was seven so the experiences described in the novel feel authentic.

\[\text{Barbara Band}\]

**Winter, A. P.**

**The Boy Who Went Magic**

Illustrated by Kathryn Shoemaker

Chicken House, pp304, £6.99

978 1 910655 09 2

An unnamed three-year-old boy is enrolled by his hoody guardian at Oneiros School, where, ten years later, Bert, as he is known, is still generally avoided by his fellow-pupils, except for the lugubrious Norton and Finch the girl with steel, prosthetic legs.

Magic is derided and forbidden in science-obsessed Penwellyn: all mages have been executed, and Bert is warned by Cassius, a quasar or investigator in evil Prince Vos’s service to avoid any kind of involvement in magical activity. Bert is rescued from the threat of imprisonment and worse by the mercurial Professor, the pirate, and his daughter of the metal legs, Finch. In their piratical explorations they are doggedly pursued by Vos’s henchmen.

Adventure at its swashbuckling best marks this first of what is obviously going to become a series of adventures. Set action pieces move the story on: particularly good is the encounter with skeletons in the bowels of a wrecked airship. The opening sequence could be summed up in the phrase ‘It was a cold and foggy night’, and sets the tone for the book. There is humour in the telling, and the devil-may-care Professor can be obtuse in his constant search for treasure. Bert is heroic only by necessity, nicely contrasted with the reluctant Norton who is more than he appears, and the feisty Finch. Prince Vos is notably villainous. Hopefully, the sequel will prove equally exciting.

\[\text{Peter Andrews}\]
The concept of ‘Force’ is central to physics, but it is not an easy one to explain or understand. A-level students are sometimes confused and this is brave to attempt to explain this to much younger students. The examples, everything from a seesaw to a volcano, are well outlined. These succeed in showing how a force can enable an athlete to perform a high jump or how magnetic attraction is utilised. The diagrams and illustrations are very good and are supplemented by ‘flowcharts’ which try to give a scientific style to the explanation. The book is one of a series entitled ‘Flowchart Science’. I am sure many readers will come away with a fine understanding of how a crane lifts its load or how tidal power operates but I am not convinced they will develop an understanding of the concept of ‘Force’.

Nick Hunt

Conrad, Steve

Enough Water? A Guide to What We Have and How We Use it
Firefly, 2017, pp72, £6.95
978 1 77085 818 3

Water seems an ever present and very simple commodity; it is not surprising that we can easily take it for granted. Starting with the facts that so much of the water on our planet is either salty or frozen, the author leads us to the realisation that it is actually more scarce than we might appreciate. The text then explores how much we use and how much we misuse before cataloguing how much water is needed to grow an apple or to produce a smart phone. I found it repetitive in the way it uses many pages to demonstrate the quantity of water required for so many different things. I felt the point could have been made with fewer examples. However the conclusion that we use so much for everything shows that there is not ‘Enough’. The book somewhat inevitably concludes with hints to limit personal usage and how we might adapt our lifestyle to be more conscious of our over consumption.

It is a book which powerfully makes its point, and it’s a point well worth making. However I would have liked the examples to have been limited and more space given to the ways in which different communities across the world harvest and use water differently to those of us in the first world who can easily be limited to our own perspective.

Nick Hunt

Colson, Mary

Forces (Flowchart Science)
978 1 4747 3130 0

The concept of ‘Force’ is central to physics, but it is not an easy one to explain or understand. A-level students are sometimes confused and this is cats that we usually never get to see in the wild – even the jaguar from the rainforest, other than in 2005.

The illustrations are impeccable. The colour throughout mimics the spottedness and colour of these felines. It is a serious book on cats, for there is scientific information on some of the rarer species. The colour illustrations are spectacular and endearing, and how wild cats are camouflaged, hunt and integrate into their habitats are all described and illustrated. The illustrations are particularly unique recalling Rousseau’s style on rainforests. This is a superb book for all libraries and for anyone up from 6 years of age.

John Feltwell

DK

Sharks and Other Sea Creatures (Practical Facts)
978 0 2412 7438 5

This is a book for all libraries and for anyone up from 6 years of age. In this book the reader is introduced to different kinds of bridges, how they work and how they are made. The pages...
are not overloaded with information and include photographs of the bridges discussed. The information sections are balanced with simple experiments using basic classroom equipment to demonstrate what has just been explained. There are clear instructions and photographic examples to go alongside these relatively quick but informative experiments, making it a great way to help pupils engage with the topic and help illustrate the engineering in bridge design in a simple, understandable way for young minds.

The most useful aspect of this book is the experiments, making it a great source of inspiration for classroom activities and the amount and level of the text makes it ideal for KS1/2 readers. More examples of famous bridges could have been useful to support certain topics, but for a more design and technology approach to bridges, then this book, and others in the series, are well worth investing in.

Other titles from the Young Engineers series include Building Structures and Towers, Building Vehicles that Fly and Building Vehicles that Roll.

Cassie Kemp

Guillain, Charlotte

The Street Beneath My Feet

Illustrated by Yuval Zommer

Words & Pictures, 2017, pp20, £14.99

978 1 78493 731 7

Charlotte Guillain has written both fiction and non-fiction, Yuval Zommer transitioned from advertising to picture book illustration and they have teamed up here to produce this book which has an ingenious way of showing the layers of the earth under our towns and cities. The concertina arrangement of pages gradually reveals cross-sections of pipes, drains, cables, sewers, archaeological relics, underground railways, limestone caves and rivers, and coal mines before reaching the earth’s mantle and core. Each page includes text around and within the illustrations explaining the elements created by human activity as well as plenty on the geological structures to be found.

From the centre of the earth the reverse of the concertina returns back through the depths with more whole page pictures of minerals, rocks and fossils back to the surface, emerging through a wild landscape into the countryside. The final illustration on the back inside cover shows the distances from crust to core. The colourful whole page images are clear with plenty to pour over and details to discuss. This is a fascinating book for young scientists and any child with an enquiring mind.

Wendy Wickey

Hancher, Adam

Taking Flight: How the Wright Brothers Conquered the Skies (Dare to Dream)


978 1 84870 928 5

Published to coincide with the 150th anniversary of Wilbur Wright’s birth, this is the first in a new biographical series called ‘Dare to Dream’. Author/illustrator Adam Hancher has commented on how the whole Wright family were incredibly interesting and it is good to see Wilbur and Orville’s sister Katharine featured in this picture book version their story.

The illustrations have a vintage feel which suits the historical period and on many of the pages the artwork effectively suggests the movement of air which has such a strong part to play in ‘taking flight’. Rather than focusing on the technical details, the emotional content of the story is writ large, charting the brothers’ shared dreams and passion for invention, the occasional setbacks and frustrations, their determination to keep trying and the excitement of success. The book concludes with some fascinating contemporary photographs and an extended version of the Wright Brothers’ truly inspirational story.

Chris Rauth

Hunter, Nick

Hoping for Peace in Afghanistan (Peace Pen Pals)


978 1 4747 3120 1

This series is based around a simple idea, what would children from two sides of a conflict say to each other if they were pen pals? This is a wonderful way to enlighten children about the similarities between diverse cultures.

This 48-page book includes a contents page, glossary and a section called ‘Find Out More’ which lists useful books and websites. There is also a very valuable index page to aid information retrieval of the major subjects covered in the book. The first few pages give detailed information of the conflict and what it means to the world and those involved. This particular book deals with Afghanistan and so photographs, maps and statistics of the country introduce the topic. Each chapter details certain aspects of life in Afghanistan and is interspersed with letters written by each of the pen pals that form a more personal view of their world.

The language is easily accessible without being too simplistic and as each of the double pages contains numerous colour photographs it is suitable for a large number of pupils and their varying ability. This is a worthwhile book to have in any library and the series as a whole would be beneficial to pupils up to the age of 13.

Erica Dean

Litton, Jonathan

The Earth Book: A World of Exploration and Wonder

Illustrated by Thomas Hegbrook

360 Degrees, 2017, pp64, £19.99

978 1 84857 524 0

This is a magnificent book. It sets out to describe our planet, but starts by putting into context, an insignificant middle-aged space rock!

The book is divided into four sections, The Physical characteristics of the planet, The evolution and variety of life forms, The variety of ecosystems that exist across the earth, and finally The human impact upon the planet. The depth of information is impressive but so is the accessibility. The simple, engaging language and the stunning illustrations combine with great success. Plankton, dinosaurs, homo erectus and the water cycle are all given a deserved mention as playing a role in the complexity that is our planet.

The book concludes with a look at the wonders of the world and the threats and poses the question, ‘Are we alone?’ There are hours of pleasure and instruction to be garnered from this book, whether sitting alone in a school library or being taken through it with a caring adult.

Nick Hunt

Manning, Mick and Granström, Brita

Books, Books, Books


978 1 91095 998 5

Mick and Brita have been producing quality children’s books for years: in fact they celebrate 24 years with this book, and this is another gem. It takes the reader on a tour of the British Library, starting with a whole lot of figures denoting its enormous size and capacity. We go inside, and find out that the St Cuthbert Gospel was found in a coffin, went into private hands, and was bought in 2011 for £9 million. We discover the wonderfully illuminated Lindisfarne Gospels, the warrior Beowulf, the Canterbury Tales, the enormous Klencke Atlas that takes six people to lift it, and Lady Jane Grey’s prayer book found after her execution. On we go through Shakespeare’s folio editions, Jane Austen, the Brothers Grimm, Dickens and Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes – but not just novels, there are Leonardo da Vinci’s scientific notebooks, (some of them in mirror writing), gruesome old medical textbooks, Darwin’s discoveries, newspapers from the very early days without any pictures but fascinating adverts, and Handel’s score for his Water Music.

These are treasures indeed, and there is just enough information in each double-page spread to whet children’s appetites and make them want
to know more. The fact that the BL receives copies of every book published is mentioned, as are other National Libraries, and there is a useful Glossary.

This is fun, very accessible for browsing, and will be a useful addition to the school library.

Diana Barnes

Meister, Cari

Totally Amazing Facts About Outrageous Inventions (Mind Benders)

978 1 4747 3740 1

This attractive series, aimed at primary school children, continues with a fun look at inventions. The featured inventions are randomly arranged rather than being organised by date, so that familiar everyday devices such as TV, bicycles and aircraft are interspersed with frankly wacky creations such as Hugo Gernsback’s Isolator (a felt hood that blocked sound, allowing the wearer to concentrate better – but required an oxygen tank to avoid suffocation) and Isabella Gilbert’s Dimple Maker, a clamp that pressed small knobs into a person’s face (‘Did it work? Not really’). The presentation is colourful and busy, making good use of a small format and with many photos of the various inventions. There is a glossary of unfamiliar words, and also a selection of websites and books for further reading. This book would be a painless way for young people to learn about the history of inventions and would be a good addition to a primary school library.

Anna Quick

Mould, Steve

How to be a Scientist

Dorling Kindersley, 2017, pp144, £12.99
978 0 2412 8308 0

This is a really interesting overview of a range of science topics. The approach is one of experimentation and finding out for yourself rather than a lot of facts to take in, so would really appeal to those who learn from doing! The book is split into three different types of pages all of which are double-page spreads, these include an overview of the specific topic (e.g. Habitats or Solar System), experiment pages to help you find out more and biographies of famous scientists related to that topic. The book is split into general science areas (Natural world, Human body, Chemistry. Earth, Physics and Space) and then within these areas a few key concepts are explored (which on the whole seemed to be themed very much around the KS2 science curriculum covering things like evolution, materials, senses, water cycle and electricity). The experiments are easy to do and most don’t require much in the way of specialist equipment. Each one is designed to help explain a scientific principle and includes extension experiments to answer further questions and encourage the reader to explore their own curiosity. Some of the experiments included are ones you will have seen lots of times before but others were really ingenious and different and made me want to rush home and give them a try! I particularly liked the one which recreates a meteor impact, the lolly stick chain reaction explosion and making your own rainbow from sweets.

The scientist biography pages are also a great addition as they highlight a good variety of people including Albert Einstein, Mary Anning, Rhazes (Iranian Biologist and Chemist) and Dimitri Mendeleev. As well as these more comprehensive guides to famous scientists there are mentions of many other scientists on the other pages which could spark further interest if the reader wanted to find out more (e.g. Fibonacci, Jane Goodall and Archimedes).

This would have lots of uses both as a browser book for the curiously minded, any budding scientists in your school and as topic books for the science curriculum. It would also be a great resource for teachers to help inject some fun into science lessons. The text is clear, simple and well thought out. It gives enough information to explain the concept but without overcomplicating it or making the subject dry. The pages are well laid out and colourful making the whole book appealing and child friendly. The instructions for the experiments are easy to follow and fully illustrated with clear pictures. It also includes a comprehensive glossary and index making it a useful reference book as well.

Isobel Powell

Nottebohm, Maria-Christina Sayn-Wittgenstein and Tinterow, Gary

Old Masters Rock: How to Look at Art with Children

978 1 910258 04 0

Maria-Christina Sayn-Wittgenstein Nottebohm, also known as ‘Puppa’ is an experienced art dealer, advisor and agent all of which really shines through in this excellent guide to classic art. ‘Puppa’ describes how she wants to make art ‘fun’ and avoid the ‘mistakes’ we often make when looking at art with children – trying to cram too much in. The aim of the book is to make art accessible and it certainly achieves that. Her sound advice directed at parents but it could also be used by teachers when visiting a museum whether locally or on a trip or holiday. This book is also designed to empower children to choose what they want to see and ask simple questions to allow for exploration of the paintings themes.

It is interesting that Old Masters, rather than more contemporary paintings, are the chosen works of art. However, by presenting them in an unusual and quirky way with lots of details and questions, this book shows students how important these works of art are in the history of art and impact of the artist’s techniques. Artists included cover a range of countries, centuries and styles: Breughel, Klimt, Munch and Turner, as well as lesser known painters. There is a useful introduction with some top tips about looking at art. Then the book is divided into themed sections: grouped by themes such as: animals through to science & technology and news of the day. Each painting is accompanied by an informative introduction to the painting and questions to make the reader think about the key aspects of the painting. There is a sidebar biography of the artist that gives a basic introduction and could inspire the reader to find out more. A “fun fact” is included which adds a different dimension to the context of the painting.

Old Masters Rock is written in an easy and accessible style and would be a really useful addition to either a primary or secondary school library. It is a book that could be used by both students and staff for research or just flicking through. Teachers could use it to introduce a theme in art or a lesson on art appreciation. From using the techniques that Puppa suggests, students could then go on to create their own works or explore further an artist or movement.

Sam Sinclair

Robinson, Hilary and Impey, Martin

A Song For Will and the Lost Gardeners of Heligan

Straus House, 2017, pp64, £14.99
978 0 9571245 3 0

Life at home and on the Front during the First World War is portrayed in this series of letters between pigeon-chested Alfie, errand and gardener’s boy at Heligan, near Mevagissey in Cornwall, and his friends who have gone to war. From the initial enthusiasm and excitement of enlistment through the ever-growing shortages at home and the anxieties of families awaiting news of the soldiers to conditions on the Front and the spread of war to places where the Heligan staff would never have imagined going, this fictionalised account of events is accompanied by some beautiful and atmospheric paintings, alternating between garden and village life in Cornwall and the conditions experienced by the soldiers. There is one sobering picture of the crew of a new tank, which was thought to be invincible, accompanied by a letter from the soldier who survived the destruction of the tank.
A Song for Will presents the experience of war from the viewpoint of ordinary people rather than the politicians and generals; it’s attractively produced – with one caveat about the handwritten appearance of the text – and will probably be popular with visitors to the Lost Gardens of Heligan for its appearance alone. Pupils looking for a different approach to the War will find it useful.

Peter Andrews

Smith, Matthew Clark and Tavares, Matt

Lighter than Air; Sophie Blanchard, the First Woman Pilot


The quotation by Charles-Augustin de Coulomb on the first page of this beautiful picture book for older children very much sets the scene for the story of Sophie Blanchard. ‘No endeavour for man to rise into the air can succeed, and only fools would attempt it’. The story begins with the Montgolfier brothers and their ‘mad dreams of floating bags in the sky’ over the rooftops of late 18th century Paris. Like the rest of France, Sophie loved the stories of the brave balloonists and when she married the daredevil Jean-Pierre Blanchard she travelled with him in a balloon above the earth. When he died, she carried on his popular ballooning shows and gained the nickname of ‘the bird woman’. Napoleon gave her official titles and when he had a son she dropped leaflets over Paris from the air to inform the public.

The colourful illustrations are beautiful and not only inform but bring the text to life. I had not heard of Sophie, but this book inspired me to research her in more detail, starting with the excellent author and illustrator’s notes and the bibliography. Everyone loves a fabulously illustrated picture book and this one deserves a place in every primary school library as not only should it be read for the story and illustrations, it should be used as a resource for history, science and art.

Judith Palka

Spilsbury, Louise and Spilsbury, Richard

Incredible Robots in Space (Incredible Robots)


This is a detailed and informative book about the work of robots and the development of robotics in space travel. This includes the first use of robotics in studying the galaxy with probes, through to the sophisticated humanoid Robonaut currently employed on the International Space Station.

The information is sound, well explained and accompanied by relevant photographs. Good for topic work on robots, space travel and for use by STEM clubs. It has a glossary, ‘find out more’ section and comprehensive index at the back making it a good reference book. However, it is not the most entertaining of writing styles so would be unlikely to work as a leisure read and the layout and cover don’t make it jump out as a browser book. There are other titles in the series including the use of robots in medicine, underwater and in law enforcement.

Isabel Powell

Wood, Amanda and Jolley, Mike

Spot the Mistake: Lands of Long Ago

Illustrated by Frances Castle

Wide Eyed Editions, 2017, pp48, £12.99 978 1 84780 963 6

Social life rather than political history forms the basis for this unusual approach to history, from the Stone Age to Pirates of the Caribbean, among the stopping-off places being: Ancient Egypt; Ancient Greece; Ancient China; a Viking settlement; and a medieval joust, among other subjects.

Each section consists of a double-page panoramic scene, the picture littered with twenty mistakes in the detailed drawings, followed by a further double-page spread of notes identifying those mistakes and giving further information about the topic. Mistakes include: a jar of jam in the Stone Age; a bulldog in Ancient Egypt; a medieval castle on the Acropolis in Athens; a Greek vase in Ancient China, although recent research suggests that Greek pottery techniques were known in Ancient China; horse boxes and an Indian tepee at a medieval joust; a modern cruise ship sailing past a pirate galleon.

The simple timeline shows the approximate dates of the panoramas, which are boldly drawn in full colour. The text is sometimes smaller than it should be perhaps, but the book is very informative and fun, demanding interaction between readers and text, rather than passive absorption of the subject. It doesn’t pretend to be exhaustive, leaving a lot of scope for exploring the different periods in much more depth. My captive market approved.

Peter Andrews

Zommer, Yuval

The Big Book of Beasts

Thames & Hudson, 2017, pp64, £12.95 978 0 500 65106 3

Following on from The Big Book of Bugs this is by the same illustrator, Yuval Zommer from London. Trained at the Royal College of Art, he has created a niche area of illustration that is very appealing to children, from the age range 6-12. He brings them in with his many colour illustrations of animals doing all sorts of things, for instance a double page spread on foxes shows eleven foxes up to mischief, or of wolves howling at night.

The book is applicable around the world with similar busy pages on Tasmanian devils, tigers, baboons, bats, beavers and hippos amongst many others. Highly recommended for the school library and brimming full of seriously engaging beasts. Beastly words, beastly habitats and a beastly index are included.

John Feltham
Carter, James

The World’s Greatest Space Cadet

Illustrated by Ed Boxall

Bloomsbury, 2017, pp80, £5.99
978 1 4729 2946 4

My attention is instantly drawn to page 21 and a poem titled School Library, this has four sequences of 3 lines each topped and tailed with the heavy lettering of SCHOOL LIBRARY! Yes, I am biased, yes it is delightfully enthusiastic and yes it can be useful as blatant propaganda. But as a poem it is good, regardless of bias, as are so many poems in this beautifully varied collection. Creatures and birds crop up fairly often from Sid the vicious cat to a mouse who listens, noting even the slightest whisper of falling snow. The title poem and a few others venture into possibilities of future wonders but on the whole the poems appear as an uplifting celebration of the glories of our earth and life around us. Occasional diversions, such as ‘Grandad After the War’, stand out simply by being different but all are a part of the patterns of life and thought. The illustrations are eye-catching and very effective to both reflect and enlarge upon the poems they represent or simply decorate. A number of the poems are structured into the forms and shapes of the subjects they convey. This really is a splendid collection for a broad range of young readers: as well as for School Librarians!

Chris Brown

Coe, Justin

The Dictionary of Dads

Illustrated by Steve Wells

978 1 9095 916 9

A little anthology of poems written about the idiosyncrasies of Dads. Some are far better than others but there are a good number worthy of note. Some are heart felt accounts of single or absent fathers. ‘Mum-Dad’ and ‘Faraway Dad’ being examples. Others are written to make you smile and poke fun at fatherly antics and attributes! ‘Hardworking Dad’ and ‘Abracadabra Dad’ being in this category.

Justin Coe is a performance poet and I can see that many of these poems would make an audience smile or nod in recognition of familiar fatherly traits. As a collection worthy of a place in a school library, I think it is limited in its appeal. Individual poems carefully selected might have a therapeutic value in supporting young children experiencing particular difficulties in coping with family issues such as separation.

Jane Loder

Dunmore, Helen

Inside the Wave

Bloodaxe Books, 2017, pp64, £9.95
978 1 78037 358 4

The title of this collection is borrowed from surfing terminology, becoming a metaphor for being alive, moving along in a given path until, inevitably, the wave breaks on the shore and the journey is ended. In the final poem, ‘September Rain’, this is made explicit as the poet sees three surfers ‘in the slipstream of the season’ as ‘the life in me stirs like a tide/That knows when it must be gone’.

Published in what we now know was the last year of the poet’s life, it movingly, but completely without sentimentality or self-pity, conveys thoughts, feelings and reflections on mortality in a series of intertwined images and themes.

The book opens in a hospital as an anaesthetist ‘potters with his cannula’ and counts backwards while ‘the waterfall in the ante-room/Grows steadily louder’. Later, we visit Ward 78 where ‘I cannot sleep/Pain is yards away/Head off like bad weather/in the ward’s beautiful contentment’. Journeying and the ends of journeying run through the collection, sometimes connected with mythology, as in Odysseus’s homecoming, which elsewhere recalls ‘My daughter as Penelope’ at seven years old in a school production.

Memories are vividly recalled, sometimes of very specific moments, such as ‘February 12th 1994’, which takes us back to hospital, and images of ‘Girl in the Blue Pool’, where ‘I am years back and full of echoes’. The theme of being contained recurs in underground mines. trains and in a bus.

The collection has the feeling of someone taking stock and clearing out, sometimes explicitly, as ‘ten books that once were crated to America’ are unpacked, or, in ‘Rim’, where the poet is ‘getting rid, getting shot, cleansing dark cupboards’. Running through it all, however, is the wave, the sea, the relationship between the wave and the shore, ‘the borderline between the living and the dead, the underworld and the human living world’.

It is a wonderful collection, worth reading not only for the beautiful lyricism of the verse, but also for the insights into the human condition contained. It is powerful and moving without being in the least maudlin, a celebration of life made in the knowledge that it must end: ‘We travel over many waters/to reach home-coming/struggle and suffering over, the mind dissolved/ of all its troubles, burdens laid down’.

Frank Startup

Follon, Cheryl

Santiago

Bloodaxe Books, 2017, pp96, £9.95
978 1 78037 335 5

The blurb on the back of this book describes the work within as ‘idiosyncratic’, which is something of an understatement. It is a collection of eighty-three short pieces, vignettes, on an apparently random variety of subjects ranging from the mundane – socks; pretzel; air con – to conditions of being – shyness; happiness; loneliness. They incorporate places – Minneapolis; New York; Geneva, and creatures – spider; python; sea anemone. The form is not the conventional poetic arrangement in lines and stanzas, but looks like prose.

Sometimes, it reads prosaically: one piece, quoted here in its entirety, reads:

‘In my youth, I dreamed of becoming an actress, but — and not a moment too soon — realised the notion was ridiculous and that I should just be myself.’

Straightforward, literal — until one sees that it is written under the title ‘Tree’, giving the suggestion that there is more going on here than meets the eye.

Although the pieces look like prose, there is metrical variety within them and the use of figurative language which bespeaks the poetic imagination: netball, for example, joyously switches a young player’s attention from her mother’s disparaging descriptions of herself, ‘without my glasses I looked like a baby bird with skewed dots for eyes’ to ‘the mad white blur of fourteen pairs of white socks, ten ponytails, an electric buzz that is team play’. The detail of ‘ten ponytails’ is lovely, an example of close observations which can be found throughout the collection.

‘Sugar’ declares ‘Some call me fudge, others monster cones’ in a readily recognisable connection between subject and content, while, elsewhere, connections are considerably less obvious: “Python’, for example, begins, ‘it’s not as if I hang around in hotel guests’ rooms going through their medical stuff”. Some can most politely be described as enigmatic: ‘Making Do’ reads ‘I went to a bar through a fridge door in a florists’. Some read like free association.

It’s a fascinating collection, full of surprises and unexpected laughter — a personal favourite is the President Elect who takes “his big ass and green rubber ducks into the bath to sink or swim”, which conjures up an irresistible picture, but each reader will find his or her own. Discussions of possible interpretations will stimulate the imaginations of students, while consideration of the different forms poetry can take, the nature, for example, of the prose poem, should provoke some lively responses.

Frank Startup
**Adlington, Lucy**  
*The Red Ribbon*  
Hot Key Books, 2017, pp320, £10.99  
978 1 4714 0628 7  
A poignant tale set in Birchwood, the local name for the camp readers will recognise as Auschwitz-Birkenau. With four strong female protagonists, this is an original tale that runs high on emotions.

Feisty Ella secures herself a place in the dressmaking room at Birchwood and finds herself making couture clothes for the guards and wives of the officers in charge of the camp. She befriends the more fragile Rose, who produces the most exquisite embroidery. The two girls support each other when dealing with the officious Marta, another prisoner who has been elevated to the level of Prominent and is in charge of the sewing room. Rose tells stories to escape from the horrors of their everyday life and her stories and their dreams of the future keep the girls going through thick and thin. When Rose becomes ill Ella finds herself appealing to one of the guards, Carla, for whom she has made several outfits, for medicine. In another time and another place they may well have been friends, but Carla plays with Ella’s feelings regularly and her brutality will stun the reader.

A little far-fetched towards the end, nonetheless a survival.

Elen Krajewski

**Barter, Catherine**  
*Troublemakers*  
Andersen, 2017, pp384, £7.99  
978 1 78344 524 0  
This first novel by Catherine Barter is gripping and fresh in tone. Lena is an average 15-year-old whose parents have made several outfits, for medicine. In another time and another place they may well have been friends, but Carla plays with Ella’s feelings regularly and her brutality will stun the reader.

A little far-fetched towards the end, nonetheless a survival.

Elen Krajewski

**Butterworth, Jess**  
*Running on the Roof of the World*  
978 1 5101 0208 8  
An inspiring and enlightening story of friends Tash and Sam, as they escape from Tibet to India by crossing the Himalayas.

Tash’s parents are part of a resistance group in Tibet, her father authoring ‘The White Lion,’ a resistance leaflet. Following a resistance protest where a villager set himself alight, the WuJing Police are now searching houses looking for others who may be involved. As the soldiers approach, Tash escapes from their house with a rucksack containing only her father’s leaflet, a prayer bowl and a photograph of the Dalai Lama. With the help of her friend Sam and two borrowed yaks, Eve and Bones they set off on their treacherous journey to seek help from the Dalai Lama in India. Along the way they battle through snow and storms avoiding snipers and escaping from nomads, who may be informants. At last when the border is in sight, the WuJing Police are waiting for them. Sam is shot, but again they manage to escape and with the help of one of the nomads, Dawa, who was himself a member of the resistance, they finally make it into India and to a settlement for exiled Tibetans.

Desperate to meet the Dalai Lama and ask his help to save her parents and others still in Tibet, Tash is disappointed when he says that he can’t interfere and she should remember her inner strength. On re-reading her father’s leaflet Sam and Tash interpret its secret message. They tell Dawa and he sets off into the mountains. A month later Dawa returns and with him, Tash’s parents.

This is an excellent story, it maintains a good pace throughout and is filled with insights into both Tibetan and Indian culture. At the end of the book are facts which readers will find helpful to contextualise the story and understand the events described. As well as being a great read, it will also stand out well on any bookshelf, with its beautifully designed jacket of reds, oranges and yellows and its pages painted yellow at the edges. I would recommend this for KS3 and above.

Elizabeth Baskeyfield

**Chastain, Emma**  
*Confessions of a High School Disaster*  
978 1 4711 6046 2  
Told in diary format, this is fourteen-year-old Chloe’s story of a year which begins with her mother leaving home to nurture her artistic talent in Mexico and ends with Chloe’s acceptance of her parents as people, her friends as complex but still lovable and herself as equal to the challenges of high school life.

Chloe is an engaging voice, both sarcastic and self-deprecating. She charts her blunders with appealing honesty: flirting with her new friend Tris before realising he is gay, flirting with Mac Brody, the most popular guy in school even though he is in a relationship (with the most beautiful girl, obviously) and making an enemy of spiteful Bernadette, the leader of the prestigious a capella singing group. On the plus side, she does win the role of Maria in the school musical, and when Bernadette and her friends organise a protest petition, Miss Murphy, the cool Vale and Juilliard graduate Chloe admires, demolishes Bernadette at a cast meeting. So it is all the more upsetting when Chloe discovers her father and Miss Murphy are having a relationship.

Of course, Chloe’s view of her father’s new relationship has to change when her mother returns for a visit, accompanied by her younger matador boyfriend. She turns down her mother’s invitation to live with her in Mexico, realises her feelings for Mac are just a crush and at the end of a summer in which she has discovered Jane Eyre, made her peace with her father and gained in
self-knowledge she is ready to face the future. Girls of 12 upwards will love Chloe’s account of her turbulent high school year.

Sandra Bennett

Collins, Orlagh

No Filter

Bloomsbury, 2017, pp368, £7.99
978 1 4088 8451 5

This debut novel by Orlagh Collins, who previously worked in the film industry, would itself make the perfect teen film. Written in the present with an accessible and descriptive style, No Filter is highly engaging and would be a great holiday read.

No Filter tells the story of Emerald whose perfect life suddenly crumbles around her when she finds her mum unconscious on the floor of the bathroom. Sent to stay with her gran, who lives in a sleepy Irish seaside town, the summer away from her friends seems really bleak for Em. What’s even worse is that there is no phone signal or Wi-Fi for social media addict Em and she will have to experience life without a filter, hence the title. However, life looks more promising when she meets Liam. As their relationship develops, inevitably things from the past start to impact on the present and both characters have to think about how to tell the truth to each other – and themselves.

Collins uses a very effective dual narrative technique, Emerald and Liam voice alternate chapters, allowing the reader to really get to know the characters and feel involved in their relationship. And, the fact that Liam is always one chapter behind which keeps the reader’s interest and attention. The book should appeal to both boys and girls but due to some sexual and drug references, would be more suitable for Year 9 students upwards.

Sam Sinclair

Cotterill, Jo

All Too Much (Hopewell High)

Bloomsbury, 2017, pp80, £5.99
978 1 4729 3407 9

Part of the Hopewell High series of Hi-Lo books, this is a touching story about Samira who is anxious to be successful and always have the highest marks so that her father will not be disappointed in her. She puts herself under extreme pressure and then finds that she cannot cope and turns to self-harm.

Dealing with mental health issues in a clear and simple manner, this book is a heartwarming story of friendship and peer support. It is further enhanced by several information pages at the back.

Ellen Krajewski

Goodman, Alison

The Dark Days Pact (Lady Helen)

978 1 4063 5897 1

The second book in the series, this tells the story of Lady Helen Wrexhall’s Summer season in Brighton in 1812. In the first book Helen was presented at Court, and found out that she was a descendant of Reclaimers, who are charged with defending Britain against the evil Deceivers.

Helen is staying with her mentor, Lord Carlton, and training for her role. She learns to fight, and develops special enhanced powers. She learns to disguise herself as a man to be able to go out alone, and visit places banned for a woman in the 19th Century. Her heroic character manages to show that women are the same as men, despite living in times which failed to give them freedom and equality.

This is a fascinating glimpse of life at that time, we can experience the sights, sounds and smells of life in all parts of the country and at all levels of society. At that time in real life, wealthy men were interested in the occult and had clubs such as the Hellfire Club run by Sir Frances Dashwood at High Wycombe. In addition, there is an excellent plot about the battle for good and evil. Demons are abroad, but they appear to most people as exactly the same as everyone else. And for fans of romance there is the story of Helen’s attraction to her Mentor, but her belief that as a Reclaimer she is banned from marriage.

A great read, well researched, and very authentic, although the author is Australian. It would appeal to fans of Twilight and fans of historical dramas. The author’s note tells the reader which events and people in the novel are real. Highly recommended for YA girl readers who are able to tackle a novel of adult length and complexity.

Alison Maxwell-Cox

Gray, Claudia

Defy the Stars

978 1 4714 0636 2

Noemi, a seventeen-year-old soldier from an enemy spaceship finds herself stranded on a spaceship with an enemy mech she is braced to kill until he explains that he is bound to serve the ‘highest human authority on the ship’ which is Noemi, herself. However, what Noemi does not know is that Abel is a very sophisticated mech with his own agenda. Through working together and travelling to many different planets, both characters begin to question the morals and politics of their universe and what it means to be human. I found it humorous, satirical and full of fascinating science fiction ideas.

The well-constructed plot is hard to predict and the ending is full of surprises. I was hooked by the first sentence in this fast paced, thrilling science fiction novel and found it hard to put it down. I recommend it to fans of The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins and Divergent by Veronica Roth.

Judith Paika

Hazell, Jaq

My Life as a Bench

978 0 9957268 1 9

The narrator of My Life as a Bench is seventeen-year-old Ren — or Lauren Bethany Miller, as the plaque fixed to her bench tells the world. For Ren is dead, and her consciousness is anchored to the bench, bearing witness to the grief of her family and friends and re-living the past until she finally realises how she died. The reader shares her memories: of singing her favourite Amy Winehouse numbers in pub karaoke competitions, of moving from Devon to live with her father and his new family in London and of meeting and falling in love with Gabe, her boyfriend. She is also able to communicate with Lionel, similarly memorialised by the adjacent bench and his questions about her life help Ren to gain insight into some of the choices she made. Ren is appalled to learn that Gabe is to be tried for her murder and, convinced of his innocence, she has to probe her painful memories until she recalls the moment of her death. Ren’s determination to reveal the identity of the murderer provides a plot arc which sustains tension for the reader; it is slightly disappointing when the perpetrator is revealed to be her friend Maddy, motivated by jealousy of the couple’s happiness. The denouement of the novel feels a little rushed; Ren has to reach out to a psychic visitor to her bench to communicate Gabe’s innocence and in the closing chapters of the novel we learn that Gabe is found not guilty, to the disgust of Ren’s mum who refers to the ‘psychic freak’ who gave evidence at the trial. The final scene provides an emotional reunion for the lovers; Gabe visits the bench and sensing Ren’s presence vows to visit her every day. The novel takes an original approach to a love story and readers will be engaged by Ren as a character and by the unravelling of the mystery surrounding her death.

Sandra Bennett

Hill, Will

After the Fire

Usborne, 2017, pp496, £8.99
978 1 4749 2415 3

Inspired by the Waco siege in 1993 and the activities of David Koresh’s Branch Davidian cult, After the Fire is a beautifully-written, insightful novel which follows the recovery of 17-year-old Moonbeam and her fellow cult survivors from The Holy Church of The Lord’s Legion. Hill skilfully interweaves interviews with Moonbeam, conducted by a psychiatrist and a federal agent,
with chapters which reveal what life was like at the sect’s desert compound under the repressive regime of Father John.

While Hill is uncompromising in his descriptions of a harsh, draconian society in which its members are completely cut off from the outside world, what drives this harrowing story of survival is the central character of Moonbeam. We follow her journey back into the outside world, where she eventually learns to rebuild a life free from fear. Hill is adept at building suspense and while some readers might flinch at the violence and oppression he describes (the watchful eyes of the Centurions; the explosive temper of Father John and the punishments for Heresy), the central themes of control and identity will provoke discussion with older pupils.

In addition to Moonbeam, Hill also creates a well-rounded cast of secondary characters: Doctor Hernandez and Agent Carlyle, who help her come to terms with events leading up to the siege; Luke, ultimately incapable of living without the cult’s strict regime; the enigmatic Nate and sceptical, brave Honey.

There are a couple of skilful plot twists that make this book un-put-down-able; however, at its core is compassion. As Hill says in his afterword, ‘I felt like I owed it to them and to all abuse survivors not to diminish the horrors that Moonbeam had been through but not to sensationalise them either.’ One of the most important YA books published this year.

Alison Brumwell

Hinton, Nigel

The Norris Girls


978 0 9955595 1 6

The three sisters in this story are trying to cope at home with their Mum, while their father, a water engineer, is abroad working on an urgent project. The Norris Girls are completely cut off from the outside world, longs for her own pony, and is just outside the family’s orbit. The Norris Girls live with their Mum, while their father is abroad working on an urgent project. The Norris Girls are completely cut off from the outside world.

The Norris Girls is a driven and dedicated runner, who is battling with her mum and the punishments for Heresy, the central themes of control and identity will provoke discussion with older pupils.

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Alison Brumwell

Hoyle, Tom

The Challenge


978 1 4472 8677 6

Ben’s best friend Will died in an accident, and Ben is struggling to cope. He makes new friends in twins Sam and Jack, who have just moved to his school — they are cool and sophisticated and Ben feels lucky that they have befriended him. But then he starts receiving letters from Will — could it be he’s not dead after all? And as Sam and Jack embroil him in their game of Challenge, the dares get darker and deadlier. Was Will playing Challenge too? And will Ben survive? A dark, gripping thriller which is hard to put down, with some genuinely spine-chilling moments and a shocker of an ending. Perfect for fans of Michael Grant and Robert Muchamore.

Jo Sennett

Johnston, E.K.

Ahsoka (Star Wars)


978 1 4052 8790 6

Although this is a novel set in the Star Wars universe, it will appeal to more than just the diehard fans. Ahsoka is a betrayed Jedi Padawan who worked closely with Anakin Skywalker before the Jedi Order was destroyed. As she was far removed from the action, Ahsoka remained safe from the clutches of the Empire — until now. Traveling from planet to planet in the hope of finding a quiet place to settle down she happens upon an agricultural settlement. Ahsoka is good at mending things and sets up a business helping the locals. Making some tentative friendships along the way, she tries hard to keep her secrets to herself. Unknown to Ahsoka and her friends, the Empire has chosen their small corner of the galaxy to produce their special crops. Ahsoka can no longer remain on the fringes of the community and must once again embrace her Jedi training and come to the aid of those who need her.

Johnson, Mitch

Kick

Usborne, 2017, pp304, £6.99

978 1 4749 2815 1

Teenager Budi dreams of becoming an international football legend like his hero, Real Madrid striker Kieran Wakefield. But Budi’s life, hovering on the edge of poverty and making trainers in an Indonesian sweat shop, leaves little room for pursuing such aspirations.

Like the cracks that are spreading across his bedroom ceiling, Budi’s world starts to fracture the day he kicks his ball into the Dragon’s den. A local crime lord, the Dragon draws Budi into a web of deception and extortion that sees his father arrested and his long-lost uncle thrown headlong into the plot.

Johnson’s characters are beautifully drawn, from Budi’s best friend Rocky, the boy genius forced, through hardship to leave school, to his ancient chain-smoking grandma with the amazing stories and his parents, struggling against adversity with love and care.

Although a passion for football is central to the book, the different and extreme lengths to which hardship forces people is also key. Johnson handles these multiple themes with nimble footwork as he guides Budi through a series of agonising decisions in which there is no right answer. Although a place at the football academy seems, finally, to be tantalisingly within Budi’s reach, it’s his freedom to make choices — right ones or wrong ones — and his friendship with Rocky, that we are rooting for.

Beck Lockwood

Joelson, Penny

I Have No Secrets

Electric Monkey, 2017, pp336, £7.99

978 1 4052 8615 2

This is a great murder mystery told from the point of a wheelchair bound teenager with cerebral palsy. Because Jemma cannot speak, people often share their secrets with her; and when a murderer confesses to her, she shares Jemma’s frustration at not being able to help solve the crime, as well as her mounting fear for the safety of others, including herself. Jemma’s family is complex — she is fostered along with nine-year-old Olivia who has behavioural problems and six-year-old Finn who has severe autism. The foster parents are saints, mounting stress pushes them to their limits. The situation is further complicated by a revelation about Jemma’s biological family. At the heart of this tense thriller is a thought-provoking exploration of living with disability. I was hooked from the first page and read the novel in one sitting. This is an excellent debut novel which deserves a wide readership.

Chris Routh

Johnson, Mitch

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Chris Routh
action is gripping and the villains she faces are on a par with Darth Vader himself. With a strong female lead and Kaeden, probably the first gay Star Wars character, this is more than your average franchise novel. I will highly recommend this novel to fans of action and science fiction.

Erica Dean

**Kemmerer, Brigid**

**Letters to the Lost**

Bloomsbury, 2017, pp400, £7.99

This is a very ingenious novel. Kemmerer has found a plausible device for allowing her two protagonists, Juliet and Declan to learn each other’s inner thoughts while, initially, fencing around each confrontationally in ‘real’ life. Juliet leaves letters for her recently dead mother on her gravestone. Declan, inwardly troubled but outwardly frighteningly hostile, is working in the cemetery on the American equivalent of penal community service and starts answering the letters. Then they each set up anonymous email addresses and suddenly we’re in the quasi-18th century world of an epistolary novel with information and feelings dripped in very skilfully. At the same time the two of them know each other at school but there’s a lot of sniping and misunderstanding.

It’s a long novel and their each realising the identity of the other and developing a proper relationship is a very gradual process. Both have serious problems in family life which the other helps to alleviate. And both have delightful best friends in Rowan and Dev. There’s some very fine characterisation in this interesting novel which also manages to spring a few plot surprises along the way. A compelling read, it’s one of the most original novels I’ve read in a while and proves, yet again, that 21st century originality doesn’t consist only in fantasy.

Susan Elkin

**Landman, Tanya**

**Beyond the Wall**

Walker, 2017, pp304, £7.99

978 1 4063 6627 3

The ill treatment of women lies at the heart of this slightly pointed story about mean spirited Romans and noble English barbarians. The slave, Cassia, must escape her vindictive master before he succeeds in raping her, while handsome Roman spy, Marcus Aquila, must find redemption by rescuing his half-sister from the unwanted attentions of his father. In between these two plot points the pair find ways to help each other and to save themselves. Cassia and Marcus flee a variety of peril by foot, boat, horse and ox cart, in a plot that has as many twists and turns as Londonium’s busy streets. The narrative wheels threaten to come off on more than one occasion, however, as Landman swerves between story and back-story and as the paths of her protagonists diverge and converge.

In the naming of one of her principal characters, Landman boldly invites comparison with Rosemary Sutcliff’s *The Eagle of the Ninth*. Although there might be room for a fresh imagining of life in Roman Britain, this headlong dash perhaps doesn’t find sufficient space for its characters to develop to fully hit the mark. No doubt, however, teen readers will find themselves taking the plunge alongside Cassia and Marcus when Landman produces her final Thelma and Louise-style narrative twist.

Beck Lockwood

**Levez, Olivia**

**The Circus**

Rock the Boat, 2017, pp304, £7.99

978 1 78607 094 4

Willow appears to have everything, a rich father, her own pony and a place at a prestigious boarding school. So why does she keep running away? All is not as it seems for Willow. Her Dad is distant so she idolises the Mum that died when she was young. On the day of her father’s wedding Willow decides to runaway again and this time she is determined not to be found. Things get really bad when she meets a girl called Suzie who steals all her money, but then Suzie comes back into her life and everything changes.

*The Circus* is a poignant and beautifully written book that draws the reader into Willow’s world. The characters of Willow and Suzie are so wonderfully drawn that you really come to feel as though you know them if not necessarily like them or approve of their actions. Willow is very naive and this means that the book will appeal to a younger audience than you might expect. The story is quirky, adventurous and overall a fairly easy read. Year 7 and 8 girls should devour this story than just Feather’s Mum’s weight issues. This plotline would be a big enough issue to focus a whole novel on – but there’s so much more to this story than just Feather’s Mum’s weight issues. The story also includes a really loving, caring relationship between the mother and daughter, Feather’s love of swimming and her dream of reaching the national finals, her best friend Jake and his complicated love life, a new boy Clay who is suffering from anorexia and parental rejection, an ever-escaping, magical pet goat and much more!

This is a story people with people so real that you recognise them all. And Grace herself is very interesting too because she ‘teaches’ you how it feels to hate change, not to know how to arrange your face, to detest surprises, not to be able to process too much information at once and all the rest of it. Lucas, ensures that you, the reader, understand what Grace is thinking and feeling at the same time as taking you past the narrator to appreciate how situations might look to others. It’s impressively perceptive.

Susan Elkin

**MacGregor, Virginia**

**Wishbones**

Harlequin Teen, 2017, pp384, £7.99

978 0 00 821729 7

Feather Tucker is on a mission to help her mum who has become one of the most obese women in Britain and find out why she hasn’t left the house for thirteen years. The story starts on New Year’s Eve in a tiny rural village when Feather’s mum falls into a diabetic coma and Feather takes it upon herself to turn her mum’s lifestyle around and make her healthy again.

This plotline would be a big enough issue to focus a whole novel on – but there’s so much more to this story than just Feather’s mum’s weight issues. The story also includes a really loving, caring relationship between the mother and daughter, Feather’s love of swimming and her dream of reaching the national finals, her best friend Jake and his complicated love life, a new boy Clay who is suffering from anorexia and parental rejection, an ever-escaping, magical pet goat and much more!

Alongside these themes runs Feather’s investigation into the secret her family – and the rest of the village – has kept from her in an attempt to get to the root of her mum’s problems. This element of the story simmers under the surface for almost the entire book before coming to a head right at the end with a big reveal that neatly ties all the characters together and answers all the unexplained questions Feather, and yourself as the reader, have about the characters.

It’s a story sprinkled with issues but without any of them feeling too intense or too heavy. Think of it like a buffet – you get to sample a little bit of all
the themes on offer without being overwhelmed by any one theme. A highly recommended read with a great protagonist and superb collection of three dimensional supporting characters that keeps you frantically reading and guessing until the end.

Cassie Kemp

Master, Irfan
Out of Heart
Hot Key Books, 2017, pp272, £6.99
978 1 4714 0507 5

Adam Shah expresses his feelings by drawing and he has a lot of feelings to deal with. His grandfather has just died and the old man’s heart been donated to someone else. His father has long since left home. His younger sister has been an elective mute since an accident for which Adam blames himself. His mother is struggling with two jobs and the family is being menaced for money by brutal thugs. All this is offset by a burgeoning friendship with a girl he fancies at school. Then William, an older white man, arrives on the doorstep. He is the recipient of the donated heart and gradually becomes an accepted family member.

The issues, with less emphasis on race than you might expect, are complex and interesting in this very busy novel. If, for example, you receive someone else’s heart is it just a physical transaction? What are the psychological implications? Is it even a good idea for a recipient to meet and fraternise with the donor’s family? It’s well paced, compelling and strong on depicting relationships of all kinds although the ending, to me, is a disappointing cop-out.

Susan Elkin

Matthias, Sarah
A Berlin Love Song
978 1 909991 40 8

This is an emotional and compelling work of fiction set during the Second World War. Lili a Romani gypsy from a traditional circus family has her world turned upside-down when she falls in love with Max, a reluctant member of the Hitler Youth. As the war progresses Lili’s family move from their ‘vardo’ (caravan) to an apartment block in an attempt to conceal their gypsy identity and to remain safe.

However, one night the family is visited by the SS and removed. Feeling sick and faint, Lili realises she is pregnant with Max’s child. Knowing their love was forbidden, Lili confides only in her sister Frieda. Max desperately searches for Lili without success. Whilst held at Auschwitz Birkenau, Lili and her family must do all they can to survive. Being held in a different area of the camp to the Jews, the gipsies must perform for the SS soldiers to keep them happy and to keep themselves fed. Lili describes the desperate life in the camp with her family and her baby son, Rollo; from the fate of the Jews to the sickness and the arrival and presence of Doctor Mengele.

Meanwhile, Max has been conscripted to the Panzer division of the German Army and despite his initial attempts to resist their indoctrination, the propaganda begins to sink in. The story comes to a climax at the end of the war with Max in action in France and Lili’s death following her attempts to board the last train out of Auschwitz. Following the war, Max is visited by Frieda and Rollo. Max knows instantly that Rollo is his son as he looks so like Lili. Without it being said, Max knows that Rollo will be brought up in the circus by Lili’s family. The story ends, with Max burying the only keepsakes he has of Lili, his only love.

Sadly, my review does not do this story justice as it is so emotionally charged and powerful. It gives the reader insights into the horrors of the camps but also the strength of family and tradition. It tells of first love against a backdrop of fear and destruction. Every character adds another layer to the story to show the suffering from all angles. Even when you’ve finished the book, the story stays with you. This is an truly excellent story for teens and adults alike. I have absolutely no doubt that whoever reads this book will not be able to put it down and will thoroughly enjoy it as I have.

Elizabeth Baskeyfield

McGowan, Anthony
Rook
Barrington Stoke, 2017, pp104, £7.99
978 1 7811 2723 0

Such a pleasure to read a heartwarming worthwhile story. Rook is the third in a series (Brack and Pike were the first two), about Nicky, Kenny and their Dad. There is a ‘story so far’ section at the beginning, but Rook can stand alone. In each book there is an animal – and in this one the boys help a rook which has been hurt. Teenage readers and other writers had requested a third book in the series, and I can understand why.

There are several issues discussed, and all three of the family members have made progress since everything fell apart in their world when Mum left. A big piece of the recovery is due to Jenny, Dad’s new girlfriend. All stepmothers will be rooting for Jenny, who knows exactly what to do to help everyone, and in return the boys really appreciate her.

Now I am asking for another story – what will happen when the boys finally visit their Mum? How has she moved on? And I’m off to the school library to order the first two books… A real prizewinner – and dyslexia friendly too!

Alison A. Maxwell-Cox

McLachlan, Jenny
Stargazing for Beginners
Bloomsbury, 2017, pp352, £7.99
978 1 4088 7975 7

A novel about a fifteen-year-old girl which initially feels as though it is aimed at a much younger audience. It is full of facts about space – the protagonist, Meg, is obsessed with all things related to space – and the character initially seems quite immature for her age. For example, she has never changed her sister’s nappy or looked after her on her own. Very quickly, this changes, as Meg’s mother abandons her to volunteer in Myanmar, leaving Meg alone with her baby sister. This is when the story becomes pretty wonderful. We meet a cast of really credible, colourful, interesting characters through Meg, and we see the world through her quirky eyes. We get to know her little sister Elsa, and the sisters’ relationship becomes a truly lovely spectacle, as does the girls’ relationship with their eccentric grandfather. Space and the scientific world become the means for Meg to socialise and meet Annie and the rest of the ‘Biscuit Club’, and Ed, her love interest.

What stands out here is the message that Meg does not need to change herself or hide her true self in order to be accepted. On the contrary, the more she lets her wackiness show, the happier she becomes and the more people she attracts. This may not attract the middle or upper young adult audience, but it will definitely be popular with younger teens.

Katie Dickson

Nicholls, Sally
Things a Bright Girl Can Do
Andersen, 2017, pp432, £12.99
978 1 7834 4525 7

The tendency of history to tell a selective story is expressed vividly by one of the characters in the epilogue to the novel: ‘They won’t teach us about all… history ain’t folk like us.’ The novel’s affirmative message is that history is about everyone, in this case all who fought to establish equal rights for women, whether from a privileged if sheltered background like Evelyn, one of the three main characters in the novel, or poor like May, or lacking an education, like Nell. The novel weaves the stories of the three young women together.

At seventeen, Evelyn already feels the constriction of her well-meaning parents’ expectations; they would like her to marry Teddy, a family friend, and have a family and home of her own. Evelyn would like to study classics at Oxford, much to her mother’s bafflement and is attracted to the suffragist movement by its promise of independence and self-fulfilment. She volunteers to take part in action which will lead to her arrest and is duly sent to prison. Evelyn meets the challenge of refusing food and water and is only
Every dress she makes could mean the difference between life and death

‘The Red Ribbon is the best YA novel about the Holocaust I have read. The story it threads together is gripping, moving and important.’

Robert Eaglestone, Professor of Contemporary Literature and Thought, Holocaust Research Institute, Royal Holloway, University of London

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TOP IN THE RHL SURVEY FOR POST SERVICE SUPPORT
released when her health is compromised – she has developed appendicitis, a common consequence of hunger strike. Meanwhile, May and Nell, who met at a suffragette rally, have developed a mutual attraction; Nell is attracted by May’s intellectual confidence and May is attracted by Nell. Their world expands as they discover their love for each other. The declaration of war in 1914 sees the beginning of significant social change which affects the lives of all three young women. Evelyn becomes engaged to Teddy, and is surprised when her father agrees to her studying at Oxford. Nell starts work in a munitions factory which tests May’s Quaker pacifist convictions and their relationship ends. The developing story spans the war years: May’s mother becomes a heroine of the suffragist movement for refusing to pay her taxes, Nell takes evening classes in secretarial studies and Evelyn marries Teddy and completes her studies. In a final scene, May and Nell meet and look back on what the movement has achieved.

As much a coming-of-age story as it is historical fiction, the novel will provide insight into an overlooked aspect of social history for readers of 12 upwards.

Sandra Bennett

Orr, Wendy

**Dragonfly Song**


*Dragonfly Song* is a beautifully written and illustrated book set in ancient times. The novel is resplendent with folklore, magic and heroism which quickly captivates the reader. Set on a small island near Crete the story centres on the life of an elective mute girl, Aissa. We follow her from birth where she becomes the discarded daughter of a Snake Priestess, smuggled to safety by an aged wise woman. Her journey takes her from being a beloved adoptive daughter to an unwanted servant, wise woman in training and knowing the glory of being a bull dancer for the King of Crete. Aissa’s life is full of hardships and trials but her ability to control animals, Kelya the Wise Woman and resourcefulness help her to survive and eventually flourish.

The book is written in two styles, ordinary prose and sections that resemble a Greek chorus. This will delight children as it quickens the pace of the action. The reader roots for Aissa when she reaches her lowest points and rejoices when she shows her true courage and worth. Known as ‘No-Name’ for much of her life she overcomes the prejudices she faces, throwing off the mantle of Cursed Child to become the miracle she was born to be.

Erica Dean

Pratt, Non

**Truth or Dare**

Walker, 2017, pp304, £7.99 978 1 4063 6693 8

There are always two sides to a story and Non Pratt’s latest novel *Truth or Dare* tells just that. Read Claire’s version from the beginning, then flip over the book to find out Sef’s take on their fund-raising challenges. Claire is mortified when the boys from school uploaded the footage of her halter-neck top failure and gave her the nickname #MilkTits. There’s no way she wants to get involved with any online stunts but Sef Malik needs her techie help: filming and uploading video of dares to raise money to pay for the care facilities where his brother is having treatment after a fall. Claire is drawn deeper into the scheme for Truth Girl and Dare Boy as they raise the donation targets in line with the increasing risk attached to each subsequent challenge. Their online chemistry spurs her on while Sef is driven by the guilt he feels about his brother’s accident.

I enjoyed Non’s first book *Trouble so was delighted to find that the main characters in her latest book were equally engaging, reflecting the online lives of Claire and Sef’s alter-egos. I’m sure the quirky split of the narrative and the engaging story will appeal to fans and attract many more.

Wendy Worley

Priestley, Chris

**Flesh and Blood**

Barrington Stoke, 2017, pp88, £6.99 978 1 7811 2688 2

Master of horror, Chris Priestley, and publisher, Barrington Stoke team up for a gripping read set in London during the Blitz of 1940–1941. Each short chapter is headed by Priestley’s atmospheric black-and-white illustrations.

When a badly injured boy is found in The Dead House, an abandoned building in Bill’s neighbourhood, after a night-time bombing raid it seems the answer to Bill’s prayer. Having been evacuated to Suffolk with his sister, Jane, then moved suddenly back to London, Bill struggles to fit in with his old friends. His idyllic life in the country had been ruined by Jane’s inability to settle. The relationship between brother and sister is inevitably strained and each wants nothing more than a new brother. Could the burned boy be what they have both wished for? When Bill’s mother agrees to take the mystery boy in to recover from his injuries, things take a sinister turn.

Priestley is skilful at building tension between the family members; the heavily-bandaged boy’s presence becomes steadily more oppressive, and the climactic moment is truly chilling. This is a well-executed high interest, low ability read and one which also invites discussion about wartime London and life on the Homefront.

Alison Brumwell

Shan, Darren

**Zom-B Bride**


This is the tenth in the enjoyably stomach-churning *Zom-B* series, about a takeover by zombies (naturally). For those who haven’t read the first nine, the first chapter gives a useful catch-up. I won’t attempt to summarise here the frenzied mashup of zombies, mutants, killer babies, insane clowns, etc., etc. pursuing and battling each other in post-apocalyptic London; suffice it to say that students love them. This instalment unleashes astonishing revelations about the origin of the killer babies and of Becky Smith herself. Although events of extreme violence are shown, the depiction is very cartoonish, and is unlikely to disturb many over 11. I like Paul Cosme’s new covers, which resemble two-colour linocut-style poster art – though the older covers by Cliff Nielsen better represent the over-the-top gore-fest within.

If your school library is like mine, then these are much-borrowed and popular books at lower secondary level, and well worth buying. Shan has sold over 25 million of his various titles, so he must be doing something right.

Anna Quick
Sheehan, Nikki

Goodnight Boy

Rock the Boat, 2017, pp352, £7.99
978 1 78607 210 8

Goodnight Boy tells story of JC, a Haitian boy and his dog. Boy who at the start of the novel are confined in a shed. The novel is told effectively in two tenses. Use of the present tense describes and details of life in the shed for JC and Boy. Sheehan then cleverly uses the past tense in flashbacks to fill in the backstory and provide a context to the traumatic situation the two characters find themselves in. While the prose is clear and simple, it is powerful. This is a gripping read with lots of tension as the reader starts to feel the mental and physical impact of the confinement on JC.

JC was caught up in the Haitian earthquake and was struggling to survive before meeting Melanie, a Haitian-American who smuggles him into America, impatient with the time the legal adoption process is taking. Once settled in her home, Melanie’s husband begins to have issues with JC being there and when Melanie disappears things start going wrong. However, it isn’t all dark as there are lots of lighter moments to diffuse the tension. For example, the scene when JC builds a snowman is very touching and explores the innocence of the boy who is now living a very different life. ‘Goodnight, Boy’ ends in a somewhat neat conclusion, but this does allow the reader the chance to feel optimistic about JC’s future.

This emotive novel covers a variety of themes: loss, friendship, family and displacement. It would be a valuable addition to any library and is suitable for confident Year 7 readers upwards.

Sam Sinclair

Sorosiak, Carlie

If Birds Fly Back

978 1 5098 3586 7

A touching debut suitable for readers aged 13 and above, If Birds Fly Back is a coming of age book set against the backdrop of one magical Miami summer. The story is told from the dual perspectives of film buff Linny and physics mad Sebastian, whose worlds collide when Linny’s sister Grace disappears around the same time that cult movie star Alvaro Herrera reappears in an old people’s home long after being presumed dead.

Sebastian and Linny are easy to like, and Sorosiak does a good job of giving each of them a unique voice. Sebastian’s chapters start with a quote from his favourite physics book, whilst each of Linny’s chapters begin with a snippet of her screenplay about the disappearance of her sister, both of which really helped to lift the characters off of the page and give the reader a deeper insight into each of their personalities.

Part romance and part mystery, the author manages to explore themes of family, re-connection, loss and identity with a light touch. Whilst not boundary pushing, Birds is a sensitive and uplifting story that will no doubt appeal to fans of Jennifer Niven and Sarah Dessen.

Sammie Steward

Standish, Ali

The Ethan I Was Before

Orchard, 2017, pp400, £6.99
978 1 4083 4292 3

Breathtakingly tender and poignant throughout, The Ethan I Was Before is the best teen book I’ve read for a long time.

The writing is beautifully detailed without feeling heavy and the dialogue flows naturally; pulling you into the story and bringing you closer to the characters. Ethan is a brilliantly relatable main character and the supporting cast, from grumpy Grandpa Ike, to vivacious Coralee and Ethan’s brooding older brother, Roddie, everyone is wonderfully fleshed out and genuinely believable.

At its very core, The Ethan I Was Before is a classic mystery story. What happened to Ethan’s best friend Kacey, and why? The decision to unravel the story gradually works perfectly; cleverly building tension and keeping the reader on tenterhooks as they begin to care more and more about the characters and their lives.

Although the mystery elements are brilliantly done, Standish has given the reader so much more than a puzzle to piece back together, exploring themes of friendship, loss, family and identity in great depth and with great sensitivity.

There is plenty here that readers aged 12–16 will enjoy, but this is a book that will resonate with readers of any age.

Sammie Steward

Stratton, Allan

The Way Back Home

Andersen, 2017, pp256, £7.99
978 1 7834 4521 9

Zoe is an angry teenager unable to communicate with her family, except for her beloved Granny, who has dementia. Her parents put Granny in a care home, to Zoe’s disgust; and when her cousin’s bullying escalates, Zoe decides to take drastic action and run away with Granny in tow. Searching for long-lost Uncle Teddy, Zoe will instead discover lots of home truths about her family, and will force a crisis before they can all start to heal. An absorbing and emotionally truthful story about the conflict between generations and the misunderstandings that can break families apart.

Jo Sennitt

Vinesse, Cecilia

Seven Days of You

Little, Brown, 2017, pp304, £6.99
978 1 510 20039 5

Sophia lives in Tokyo with her mother but her mother’s new job means they’ll be relocating to America in seven days. Just one week to soak up all she loves of Tokyo — but then Jamie reappears, the boy who fancied her but she rejected. This time it’s different — he’s different — and before she knows it, Sophia is falling in love. But time is running out for this tumultuous couple. An engaging romance for young adult readers, with lots of teenage angst to enjoy but with a satisfying ending. Will appeal to fans of John Green.

Jo Sennitt
Waite, Judy
Lena’s Story (The Street)
Bloomsbury, 2017, pp96, £5.99 978 1 4729 3400 0

Part of The Street series, where each book focuses on a different character within a group of friends living on the imaginary Swaton Street, Lena’s Story is an engaging and enjoyable read.

Lena Kowlaski is out with her friend, Chelsea when she spots an abandoned puppy and decides to rescue it. At the same time two hooded cyclists nearly run her down and clip the dog in the process. This incident ignites a chain of events that complicate Lena’s busy life. Her dad wants her to get a job waitressing and it would fill the time that she can’t spend in the local theatre school now it has closed. However, Lena wants to spend time with the puppy not serving coffee. Then, when a wallet belonging to her boss goes missing, dad points the finger at her friends, Lena feels she can’t take anymore. A dramatic gesture brings events to head and Lena finds out who her friends really are.

Lena’s Story is a hillo style quick read and is printed on yellow paper, therefore making it suitable for some forms of dyslexia. There is also a twelve question multiple choice quiz at the end, along with discussion questions to make the reader think about the issues raised in the story. This book would be a great addition to any library collection, appealing to reluctant readers and students with dyslexia in the first reading sessions. The story is suitable for Year 7 upwards.

Sam Sinclair

Wallman, Sue
See How They Lie
Scholastic, 2017, pp320, £7.99 978 1 4071 6538 7

Mae has grown up at the idyllic Hummingbird Creek Facility, part-resort, part-rehab. As the daughter of the brilliant psychologist who runs it, she enjoys access to the same sports training, recreational facilities and medical care as the troubled teens whose lives the Creek lifestyle is supposed to turn around. But as Mae’s longing for life outside the Creek grows, the more obvious it becomes that the Creek will never let her go without a fight.

This is a gripping psychological thriller; the build-up is slow, but for me that only deepened the mystery. There is so much to learn about life at the Creek that it was never boring, just suspenseful. I would however, have liked a bit more detail in the ending as the mystery unravels and we hurtle towards an action-packed finish. A few more answers about how this went on for so long would have been satisfying. But Mae’s feeling of being trapped will resonate with many readers desperate to take their next step beyond school, as will her curiosity about the world outside her narrow experience. There is of course the almost compulsory blossoming romance but it was subtle and peripheral, more another aspect of Mae’s development than a box-ticking exercise. The real strength of the book is the world of Hummingbird Creek, perhaps not utterly realistic, but fully realised and totally complete.

Andrea Regan

Winter, Tamsin
Being Miss Nobody
Usborne, 2017, pp384, £6.99 978 1 4749 2727 7

Rosalind has more to contend with than many 11 year olds. Her younger brother Seb has cancer, she cannot talk when not in her family group and she is being bullied at her new secondary school. She decides to do something about the latter and sets up a blog as ‘Miss Nobody’, so that she can face the bullies and give other victims a voice. But what can she do when her persona is hijacked and people start being really hurt by the online taunts and threats? As a series of tragedies follow one after the other how will she ever get things sorted out?

There are quite a few stories about being online at the moment and they vary from the light-hearted to the really serious; this is definitely in the latter category. The themes are ones that affect many young people but which they have difficulty dealing with if they go wrong. The underlying story thread is about coping with disaster in the family and the way that families and friends can support each other through the dark times.

The author has balanced the various stories and created a truly heart-breaking tale, but there is light at the end of the tunnel and we all learn that it is best to tell the truth, rather than try and hide from it. Definitely a book not to be read on public transport; the last couple of chapters had me grabbing for the box of tissues. Highly recommended.

Margaret Pemberton

Worley, Wendy
Echoes of Friendship
Silverwood Books, 2017, pp222, £8.99 978 1 78132 597 1

From a small collection of photographs, letters and memorabilia from her own family history, the author has crafted a powerful story of the First World War and skilfully interwoven it with a story of today, of bullying, friendship and a school trip to the First World War battlefields. Fifteen-year-old Andy is sensitive and introverted, his parents are separated, there is little money in the house and he doesn’t get on with his Dad. A school project sparks an interest in his family tree, something which his Aunty Jean is able to help him with, and she supplies him with transcripts of letters which his great-grandfather Matt (known as Mac) sent from the Western Front. The letters show that Mac befriended a German soldier, Hans, during the war, and that their friendship lasted after the war was over. How this occurred is a mystery that Andy is determined to solve.

A new girl joins Andy’s class, Sophie, from Germany. She and Andy get on really well, they share their interests and their friendship blossoms, to the annoyance of Dan, the leading bully, who torments Andy at every opportunity. Andy is unable to discuss the bullying but Sophie soon realises the problem, which comes to a head on the school trip when Andy bravely faces up to his tormentor. Andy’s and Sophie’s relationship parallels the international friendship between Mac and Hans, and after one more term at Andy’s school, Sophie, like Hans, has to return to Germany. Will their relationship continue, as Mac and Hans’s did?

Powerfully and vividly drawn, this is a warm and sensitive portrayal of friendship and loss, of overcoming fear and of the common bonds of humanity. At times the prose is spare and haunting, as with the description of a beautiful September evening the moment before a gas attack, and Mac’s horror at having to watch a colleague shot by a firing squad.

With the clever technique of the alternating Mac and Andy chapters being in the first person and present tense (Mac) and third person/past tense (Andy), the author has skilfully brought the past into the present and linked the two stories together into one relevant whole. This is a story that will resonate on several levels with many teenagers, and is thoroughly recommended.

Steve Hird

Bowen, Meurig and Bowen, Rachel
The School of Music
Illustrated by Daniel Frost
Wide Eyed Editions, 2017, pp96, £14.99 978 1 8478 0860 8

This book looks really attractive and highly inviting and also it is very unusual in both content and organisation. At one level it is certainly extremely informative about music in general including the essence of music itself, from how instruments are played to rhythm and harmony. But it is also a textbook in structure asking a reader to work through page by page
and follow activities at every stage over a three term plan. After six introductory articles come the three main divisions with the first ‘Listen Up!’ having 18 lessons – 18 segments of information – from various kinds of music to music and maths. Second comes ‘Your Musical Toolbox’ covering from how music is written to composers’ indications of intent for players, last is ‘Make It Yourself’ which includes advice about performance nerves and aids to memorise music.

Each element is called a lesson, textbook style, but each is also a stand-alone brilliantly concise informative entry. Every page has distinctive, colourful, quirky, amusing illustrations with a number of delightful pictorial diagrams as well.

As a music information book this is superb! It covers aspects rarely mentioned and is quite obviously an inspired creation from practical teaching performers. As a teach-yourself sort of manual it is certainly well structured offering a great deal for interested readers, for young music students and also as a guide for teachers.

Chris Brown

Jenkins, Martin

Exploring Space: From Galileo to the Mars Rover and Beyond
Illustrated by Stephen Biesty
Walker, 2017, pp64, £14.99
978 1 4 06 3 6 008 0

Beautifully illustrated, with many of Biesty’s trademark cross-section designs, this will fire the imagination of all budding astronauts and astronomers. At times both technical and humorous, the first part of this book explores our place in the Solar System and beyond, and mankind’s never-ending sense of wonderment at the size and scale of the universe.

The history of space exploration is well documented, although the events of Apollo 13 are strangely glossed over. However, the book really comes into its own when detailing the technical achievements of unmanned satellites and deep space probes, and in particular the International Space Station. All the usual questions are answered – food, sleep, toilet requirements, etc. – along with technical and design details.

The final chapters of the book look to the future, with the potential for a manned landing and settlement on Mars uppermost in the author’s mind.

Overall, this would be a welcome addition to most school library science sections, and would also be welcome as a gift or prize.

Stephen King

Wainwright, Max

Design, Animate and Create with Computer Graphics
Illustrated by Dan Newman
QED, 2017, pp80, £10.99
978 1 7 8 4 9 3 7 4 6 1

This title covers everything from the most basic of graphic formation to more complex and tricky animation tasks. The book contains five chapters each covering a different element; Drawing and Painting, Vector Graphics, Photo Fun, Making Animations and Designing in 3D.

What I love about this book is that all the examples included are created using free software available on-line. After introducing a topic, Wainwright breaks it down into a series of steps with clearly numbered instructions and photographs to illustrate. For each topic, it gives a number of examples and uses, encouraging the user to go on and use the skills learnt for other projects. It includes information on how to use your skills safely and how to get the most out of what you can do, with fun practical tasks. It explains the terminology and includes a glossary to quickly look up any key words. It also includes advice about software and has a brief index at the back.

I think this is a superb book for anyone starting out with basic graphics. It is easy to follow and is pitched well, making it appropriate for a wide audience and the skills and knowledge gained are transferrable into other software products.

Elizabeth Baskeyfield

Warren, Mike

The Gadget Inventor Handbook
QED, 2017, pp64, £9.99
978 1 7 8 4 9 3 7 8 1 2

If you have students who visit your library under duress, and show absolutely no inclination to engage with any book you care to offer them, then this may be your answer. Who doesn’t want to know how to make a mini vibrating robot, LED slippers, a potato clock, or many other electronic gizmos? Mike Warren, a ‘…lifelong maker with a passion for making weird and wonderful things’, has assembled a fun ‘how to’ book that will enthuse many a young Heath Robinson. Some of the components required may be a little difficult to source – SPDT switch, anyone? – but most items will be found in ‘that’ kitchen drawer, or towards the back of your average garden shed.

With full instructions and illustrations, three difficulty levels, and helpful safety guidance, this is sure to whilst away many gloomy Sunday afternoons. The publishers recommend that this is suitable for Year 8 and above, which in many cases is slightly optimistic, but for late primary and early secondary school students, this will be ideal.

Stephen King

Yomtov, Nel

Tunnelling to Freedom: The Great Escape from Stalag Luft III (Graphic Non Fiction: Great Escapes of World War II)
Raintree, 2017, pp32, £12.99
978 1 4 747 3216 1

An interesting cross-over hardback – part graphic novel, part full text giving the history and setting behind the events of 24 March 1944, when 200 Allied airmen attempted to tunnel out of a Nazi POW camp. Nel Yomtov is best known for his colouring of the Transformers UK series, and Alessandro Valdrighi has recently been illustrating the Lego Nexo Knights books. Together they have created an enjoyable but brief illustration of the escape attempt, and how only three airmen were actually successful – two Norwegians and one Dutchman.

Unfortunately, the speech language is quite stilted, but the illustrations are effective, and there are useful glossaries, comprehension questions, related websites and suggestions for further readings at the rear of the book. Part of a four book series from Raintree with other titles being Behind Enemy Lines, Death Camp Uprising and Outrunning the Nazis.

Stephen King

Anderson, M. T.

Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad
978 0 7 63 6 9 10 0 4

A book initially published in the USA in 2015 where School Library Journal assessed it as ‘This ambitious and gripping work is narrative non-fiction at its best’ and that is spot on! The first 130 pages are a brief but brilliantly informative biography of the composer Shostakovich whose home was in Leningrad. His life has been subjected to Stalinist state misinformation as well as fraudulent speculative claims both of which sources are exposed and queried. The approach here is to brilliantly cut through complex issues without diverting from facts and truth.

The book then continues through revealing Russian mistakes in dealings with Hitler prior to the invasion and the start of the appalling siege of Leningrad on 22 June 1941, it continued for 872 days. Dmitri Shostakovich volunteered as a rooftop fire-watcher which gave him clear views of the incendiary and explosive bombarding descending on his city. In these night hours surrounded by immense destructive forces he began the creation of what became his 7th Symphony. The composer’s own circumstances, the progress of composition and further

starvation and deprivation of the citizens. Away from Leningrad the symphony was finished and performed, then copies of the score arrived by circuitous routes for performances in London and in America. Many found hearing music formed amidst such suffering movingly inspirational whilst Stalin hoped it would improve favourable relations for his Russia. Extraordinary events led to Shostakovich's 'Leningrad' Symphony almost miraculously being played, and broadcast, in the besieged city on 9 August 1942. This enterprise was fraught with problems with emaciated, out of practise, musicians (three died in the course of rehearsals) coping with a work needing stamina and huge resources. The concluding sections of the book deal with the aftermath for Russia, for the war and the final years of the composer who died in 1975.

This book is an amazing achievement, breathtaking in its range and scope: it is a work of scholarship, with detailed references and notes, and yet written in a form easily accessible. It has all the readability and compulsive page-turner qualities of a skilfully written thriller yet contains an immense amount of Russian, musical and military history. Stalin's murderous paranoia is exposed in all its inescapable terror of government by fear. Nazi military efficiency is chillingly portrayed too and yet it is the music, human creativity and artistic endeavour, which threads through everything and it is the music which still sounds and reaches out.

Chris Brown
* (Readers will almost inevitably want to get a flavour of the symphony. Ashkenazy, St Petersburg Philharmonic, Decca, 1997, is very fine and also has 54 secs of Shostakovich broadcasting in besieged Leningrad in 1941.)

** Anderson, Natalie C. **

City of Saints and Thieves
Rock the Boat, 2017, pp432, £7.99

In the fictional African city of Sangui in Kenya, street thief Tina breaks into a mansion and is caught red-handed by the owner's son. Tina and Michael go back a long way: her mother, a refugee has been living with gangs on the streets, thinking of life. Natalie Anderson has worked for the UN with Congolese refugees, and she uses her first-hand knowledge of their stories to good effect.

The complex plot makes this a book suitable for KS4 and older readers, who would, I hope, be motivated to find out more about the huge and diverse continent that is Africa.

Anna Quick

** Bergin, Virginia **

Who Runs the World?

Men have been all but wiped out by a deadly virus, and now can only live in isolated Sanctuaries. Women, after sixty years as pretty much the only gender, have rebuilt society, democracy, technology and industry with great success and River's attitude to the past can be summed up in her Granmumma Kate's expression, too bad, so sad, bye-bye. Until the day River finds something extraordinary and terrifying on her way home from apple-picking. An XY, a real-life boy.

Andrea Regan

** Clarke, Cat **

Girlhood
Quercus, 2017, pp384, £7.99

If Enid Blyton and John Green had a literary baby, this would be it. Girlhood is the boarding school novel for the twenty first century. It features a cast of diverse, albeit privileged, girls in their penultimate year at boarding school. Where Blyton's Mallory Towers and St Clare's had hockey sticks and midnight feasts, Duncraggan Academy has clay pigeon shooting and midnight drinking games in a cliffside cave. Like Rowling's magical castle, this Scottish school has houses and dormitories, friendship, bullying, and backstabbing. But Girlhood also features realistic LGBT+ characters coming to terms with their identities (including Harper, our bisexual protagonist), the reality of serious eating disorders and mental illness, grief and family trauma. It also conveys the intensity of a broken friendship: the strength of such a bond, and the pain in the wake of its loss.

Indeed, the novel ticks so many boxes, one would be forgiven for thinking it might not address any in much depth. This would be unfair. Girlhood's LGBT+ characters may be mentioned in passing, but not in a tokenistic way. The characters' sexuality is acknowledged and addressed throughout the story without being the main plot point; similarly the various characters of diverse races and nationalities. The story's coverage of the Harper's sister's anorexia is sensitive and extremely moving, but could be triggering and upsetting for the reader. This is a book for a more mature young adult reader. It contains swearing, drinking of alcohol, and indirect mentions of sex. I would definitely recommend it to my senior students.

Kate Dickson

** Ness, Patrick **

Release

I was tempted to leave my review at ‘it’s Patrick Ness – he never writes the same book twice – you’re going to want to read this’. But actually that wouldn’t be doing this beautiful, beautiful book justice.

Taking its literary inspiration from Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway with a healthy dose of Judy Blume’s educative Forever thrown into the mix, this is the story of Adam Thorn. Trapped in rural small town America, son of preacher parents and weighed down by their expectations, the novel’s title looms large over the narrative. On the Saturday during which the book’s action takes place, Adam crosses paths with friends, family and lovers as well as enduring a skin crawling encounter with his employer; it brings revelations, goodbyes and the tantalising possibility that Adam’s world might be reshaped by the end of it.

Interwoven with Adam’s story is the otherworldly tale of a murdered girl and a mythical Queen who move through our reality seeking answers, revenge and their own particular brand of ‘release’. If this sounds off-putting, do not fear – this is Patrick Ness remember: it just works. Though the connection between Adam and the Queen is glancing, the two narratives accelerate in harmony, propelling one another towards the day’s final denouement. As Adam navigates the real world, the parallel narrative hints to the extraordinary terror and beauty which might underlie the everyday and between the two we see the miraculous – the world stopping, world just beginning – possibilities and hardships of being a teen. In the messy confusion of relationships, love, loss, family and friendships nothing is trivialised, rather it is marvelled at. As with all Patrick Ness’s books it’s devastating, it’s optimistic but is above all it’s truthful. You are going to want to read this.

Lizzie Ryder
Witton, Hannah  
Doing It! Let’s Talk About Sex  
978 1 5263 6003 8  

Hannah Witton is a popular YouTube vlogger who won ‘Best Sex and Relationship Influencer’ at the Cosmopolitan Influencer Awards in 2016. This book, her first, carries on her work in this area and looks at a diverse range of topics including healthy relationships, LGBTQ+, porn, consent, body image, sexting, and contraception, amongst others. It is a comprehensive book with an index for easy reference.

Hannah states that information and advice about these topics is extremely forthcoming in a digital age and it is not easy to know who to trust or believe. She puts forward an honest view about her own ideas and experiences in order to bring taboo and little-discussed (but important) topics out into the open. Although the book is text heavy, it is easy to read being a mix of anecdotes, facts and advice, and the pages are broken up with sub-headings, different fonts and numbered points. Touches of humour and self-deprecation stop the book from feeling like a sex education manual. There are extracts from high profile authors such as Holly Bourne and Juno Dawson, and Hannah also pulls on her friends for comments.

Aimed at older readers, I suspect that many younger students would also find it useful and empowering. However, the content would probably necessitate putting it in the senior collection of the school library.  
Barbara Band

Register, Paul  
Graphical Novels for the 8-16+ Age Range (Riveting Reads)  
School Library Association, 2016, pp72, £15.00  
978 1 903446 96 6

Comic book aficionado and founder of the successful Stan Lee Excelsior Award for Graphic Novels in Schools, Paul Register has produced a concise introduction for those new to the rich world of sequential art. The guide consists of meticulously set out grids with the added interest of a lendability rating where Mr Register gives advice from his field of expertise as a school librarian regarding the popularity of the titles. Its carefully composed sections showcase reads aimed at four different age groups ranging from 8 to 16+.

Graphic novels are a proven medium for educating, stimulating and engaging teen readers. Striking visuals offer a new way of reading providing an arresting cinematic experience. Register covers not only key titles by DC and Marvel but adaptations of Shakespearean plays by Classical Comics and Self-Made Hero, literary classics like Bronte’s Wuthering Heights and J.B. Priestley’s An Inspector Calls (ideal for GCSE students and available in different versions – Original and Quick texts), haunting reads set during wartime, the Muhammad Ali biography The King of the Ring (which Register considers a highlight of the Indian publisher Campfire’s stable) and quirky favourites like Moonhead and the Music Machine and Chimichanga from the Excelsior Awards too.

Significantly, as Register recommends in his insightful introduction, Manga is such a specialised genre that it deserves its own SLA publication, which could also include Manwha (Korean style graphics). In spite of some impressive entries in the graphic novel universe missing, this guide still chronicles a well thought out selection. It will get librarians unfamiliar to graphic novels started while also providing a checklist for those building existing collections. It has particularly good super hero suggestions which will appeal to many readers. With a dual index presenting titles and creators listed in alphabetical order, it offers easy navigation and is attractively presented using colour coding for the different age brackets. Hopefully it will not be the only Riveting Read compiled by Paul Register revelling in this wide ranging medium.

Janet Dowling

Tregonning, Mel  
Small Things  
978 1 74336 872 5

A wordless graphic novel about depression. How it sets you apart. How you feel your body rotting away. How no one notices you. How the tiniest thing enrages you for no reason. How your whole world is full of these thoughts that don’t let you live your life. Until one day someone shows you their scars. Then you know you are not alone. That things can change. That you can see that others suffer too. And one day, you will show your scars to someone else; so that they know they are not alone. And you become more resilient.

Elegantly drawn, with black, white and grey foreshadowing the storyline. The wordlessness allows the reader to fill in their own dilemmas and create their own dialogue from their own experience. I have used this in bereavement counselling with adults and with children. Having a visual expression of something that is so personal to them has enabled them to talk about their own experience, and at times to say ‘No, it’s not quite like that. It’s like this…’ It will be useful in the classrooms for discussion, and particularly to share with pupils who may be struggling and need support to express themselves.

Janet Dowling

Index of Advertisers

2COR 185
Andersen Press 157
Contact An Author 185
D-Tech International 159
European Schoolbooks Ltd 151
Hot Key Books 185
IS Oxford inside front cover
JCS Online Resources 163
KPC Book Protection 171
MLS outside back cover
Oxford University Press 171
PSP Asset Protection 163
Softlink inside back cover
Usborne 167
WRD Magazine 171
A

Adlington, Lucy – The Red Ribbon 180
Ahmad, Ahmadrezza and Kazemi, Nahid – Alive Again 153
Alexander, Heather and Lassman, Andrea – Farm 183
Allen, Nicholas – Loo Queue 164
Allen, Scott – Llama United 164
Almond, David – The Tale of Angelino Brown 183
Anderson, M. T. – Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad 184
Anderson, Natalie C. – City of Saints and Thieves 184
Andreas, Giede and Roszelaer, Angela – Winnie-the-Pooh: The Great Heffalump Hunt 179

B

Barnett, Mac and Klassen, Jon – Triangle 180
Barrett, Catherine – Troublemakers 180
Barr, Catherine and Williams, Steve – The Story of Space 180
Barton, Amanda – The Butterfly Dance 180
Begley, Pete – The Fearless Travellers’ Guide to Wicked Places 180
Bergin, Virginia – Who Runs the World? 180
Biddulph, Rob – Sunk! 154
Bond, Michael – Paddington’s Finest Hour 164
Bowen, Meurig and Bowen, Rachel – The School British Museum 123 (First Concepts) 154
Bowen, Jenny and Findlay, Rachel – The Diversity of Life on Earth 155
Chastain, Emma – Confessions of a High School Disaster 154
Clarke, Catarina – Girlhood 190
Cohen, Oliver – No Filter 180
Colson, Mary – Forces (Flow chart Science) 175
Coughlan, Billy and Frost, Maddie – How Do You Make a Sandwich? 154
Crawford, Jan – Winne-the-Pooh: The Great Heffalump Hunt 154

D

Daly, Nikki – Surprise! Surprise! 154
Davey, Owen – Crazy About Cats 175
Davies, Nicola – The Selkie’s Mate 165
Davies, Nicola and Sutton, Emily – Lots: The Diversity of Life on Earth 155
Difrancesco, Michaela and DePrince, Elaine – Ballerina Dreams 165
Donoghue, Emma – The Lotteries Plus One 166
Donohoe, Helen – Birdy Flynn 166
Driver, Sarah – Sea (The Huntress) 166
Dolan, Elys – Knighthood for Beginners 166
Dolzan, Anna – Out of Heart 188
Donnison, Ian – The Secret of Black Rock 162
Dorothy, Belina – Illiterate Lives 162
Douglas, Hilary – The Explorer 172
Dowling, Laura – The Sea (The Huntress) 166
Drew, Annette – The Diversity of Life on Earth 155
Dunmore, Helen – Inside the Wave 179
Dwyer, John – The Unexpected Love Story of Alfred Fiddleduckling 155
E

Earle, Phil – SuperDad’s Day Off (Little Gems) 168
Ezra, Tom – Bridge Building (Young Engineers) 184
Fawcett, Sally – Through the Gate 155
Fayers, Claire – Journey to Dragon Island 155
Fayers, Claire – Voyage to Magical North 155
Flood, Clara – There’s a Walrus in My Bed! 155
Folken, Cheryl – Santiago 179
French, Vivian – The Cherry Pie Princess 155
Gaarder, Jostein and Düzakin, Akin – Questions Asked 155
G

Goodman, Allicon – The Dark Days Pact (Lady Helen) 181
Gray, Claudia – Defy the Stars 181
Gregory, Lorraine – Mold and the Poison Plot 156
Grey, Mini – The Bad Bunnies’ Magic Show 156
Guillain, Charlotte – The Street Beneath My Feet 180
H

Hancher, Adam – Taking Flight: How the Wright Brothers Conquered the Skies (Dare to Dream) 180
Hancocks, Helen – Ella, Queen of Jazz 156
Hargrave, Kiran Millwood – The Island and the End of Everything 155
Harvey, Jeremy, Bloxham, Sarah and Samuel – Room to Grow 155
Hazel, Jan – My Life as a Bench 155
Hinton, Nigel – The Norris Girls 154
Hofmeijer, Dianne and Thompson, Carol – My Daddy is a Silly Monkey 154
Honey, Elizabeth – That’s Not a Daftol! 154
Hood, Morag – When Grandad was a Penguin 154
Hopmann, Kathy – All Birds Have Anxiety 154
Hoyle, Tom – The Challenge 155
Hunter, Nick – Hoping for Peace in Afghanistan 154
J

Javis, Michael – Mrs Mole I’m Home! 154
Jenkins, Martin – Exploring Space: From Galileo to the Mars Rover and Beyond 154
Johnston, Mark – Kick 154
Johnston, E. K. – Ahhska (Star Wars) 155
Jones, Pip and Hughes, Laura – Wanted: The Chocolate Monster 155
K

Kahiu, Waruni and Adreani, Manuela – The Wooden Camel 154
Kemmerer, Brigid – Letters to the Lost 154
Knoules, Alison – Ollie and the Magic Workshop 179
Landman, Tanya – Beyond the Wall 183
Latimer, Alex and Latimer, Patrick – Wool 155
Levy, Olivia – The Circus 155
Lewis, Gill – A Story Like the Wind 155
Litchfield, David – Grandad’s Secret Giant 155
Litton, Jonathan – The Earth Book: A World of Exploration and Wonder 155
Lucas, Rachael – The State of Grace 155

M

MacGregor, Virginia – Wishbones 155
Mainstone-Cotton, Sonia – Promoting Young Children’s Emotional Health and Wellbeing 165
Manning, Mick and Granström, Brita – Books, Books, Books 155
Master, Ian – Out of Heart 155
Matthews, Megan – The Little Mermaid 155
McAuliffe, Geraldine – Where the World Ends 155
McGowan, Cynthia and McElderry, Sara – Little People, Big Dreams 155
Mckee, Brett and McKee, David – Sir Ned and the Nasties 155
McLachlan, Jenny – Stargazing for Beginners 184
McKee, Mark – Room to Grow 155

N

Nadín, Joanna – The Incredible Billy Wild 181
Nagy, Mary – The Explorer 172
Nadir, Mary – The Explorer 172
Nadine, Joanne – The Incredible Billy Wild 181
Ness, Patrick – Release 155
Newson, Karl and Fleming, Lucy – Fum 155
Nicholls, Sally – All About Ella (Little Gems) 155
Nicholls, Sally – Things a Bright Girl Can Do 155
Nicolson, Tim – Who Let the Gods Out? 188

O

O’Brien, Claire – The Terrifying Teacher 155
Owen, David – The Fallen Children 186
O’Malley, Maire – The Explorer 186
P

Peers, Bobbie – William Weston and the Lapidum Thief 172
Pett, Mark, Graham, Elspeth and Toya, Jez – The Treasure of Pirate Frank 160
Peters, Helen – Eve’s Ghost 172
Pirotta, Saviour – Mark of the Cyclops: An Ancient Greek Myth 172
Poundler, Sibéal – Bad Mermids 172
Pratt, Non – Truth or Dare 186
Priestley, Chris – Flesh and Blood 186
Puttock, Simon and Egneus, Daniel – The Thing 161
R

Register, Paul – Graphic Novels for the 8-16+ Age Range (Riveting Reads) 191
Robinson, Hilary and Impye, Martin – A Song For Willy and the Lost Gardener of Heligan 177
Root, Phyllis and Karas, G. Brian – Anywhere Farm 161
Ross, Tony – Out Our Kid 161
Rundell, Katherine – The Explorer 172
Rust, Martha E. H. – Baby Animals in Pouches 161
Rust, Martha E. H. – Today is a Windy Day 161
S

Savage, Melissa – Bigfoot, Tobin & Me 173
Schwartz, Joanne and Smith, Sydney – Town Is by the Sea 161
Schwartz, Viviane – Counting with Tiny Cats 161
Sepulveda, Luis – The Story of a Small Who 173
Discovered the Importance of Being Slow 182
Shan, Darren – Zumba Bride 186
Sheehan, Nikki – Goodnight Boy 187
Smith, Matthew Clark and Tavare, Matt – Lighter than Air: Sophie Blanchard, the First Woman Pilot 178
Soroka, Carie – If Birds Fly Back 187
Spilsbury, Louise and Spilsbury, Richard – Incredible Robots in Space 158
Standing, Ali – The Ethni I was Before 187
Stanton, Angie – Waking in Time 187
Stevens, Robin – The Guggenheim Mystery 173
Stokvis, Adam – King Cos 173
Stratton, Allan – The Way Back Home 187
Swales, Roisin – Big Hid 162
T

Teddy-Stanton, Joe – All Aboard the London Bus 183
Tebbit, Andrew – Small Things 191
Tobitski, Bob – Who’s That in the Moonlight? 189
Toft, Patricia and Usher, Sam – All About the Nasties 177

U

Uren, Hannah – Doing It! Let’s Talk About Sex 191
V

Vere, Ed – Grumpy Frog 162
Vinesse, Cecilia – Seven Days of You 187
W

Wainwright, Max – Design, Animate and Create with Computer Graphics 189
Waite, Judy – Lenya’s Story (The Street) 188
Wallman, Sue – See How They Lie 188
Waring, Mike – The Gadget Inventor Handbook 189
Watts, Irene – Seeking Refuge 174
Wechtersrowicz, Przemyslaw and Dzubak, Emilia – Hug Me, Please! 174
Winick, Judd – The Boy Who Crashed to Earth 174
Winick, Judd – Hilco: Saving the Whole Wide World 174
Winick, Judd – Hilco: The Boy Who Crashed to Earth 174
Winter, A. P. – The Boy Who Went Magic 174
Winter, Tamin – Being Miss Nobody 188
Winton, Hannah – Doing It! Let’s Talk About Sex 190
Wolf, Lauren – Beyond the Big Green 160
Wood, Amanda and Jolley, Mike – The Mistake: Lands of Long Ago 178
Woodall, Eill – Swashbuckle Lil and the Jewell Thief 175
Worley, Wendy – Echoes of Friendship 186

Y

Yomtov, Nel – Tunneling to Freedom: The Great Escape from Stalag Luft III 189
Z

Zimmer, Yuval – The Big Book of Beasts 186

Reviews for volume 54 onwards are also indexed on the SLA website: www.sla.org.uk/tsl-review-index

TheSL 65-3 Autumn 2017 192

Index of books reviewed
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