Inis is the magazine of Children’s Books Ireland, the national children’s books organisation. Within these pages you will find features and articles on Irish and international children’s books as well as in-depth reviews of new titles for children and teenagers. With its range of expert contributors, this is a key resource for teachers, writers, illustrators, librarians, parents and everyone interested in children’s books.

Continue the conversation with us at www.childrensbooksireland.ie where you will find more reviews, articles and up-to-the-minute news.

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Issue 59

Cover image © from Only a Tree Knows How to Be a Tree, written and illustrated by Mary Murphy, Otter-Barry Books, 2020.

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Ailt © na húdair faoi seach. Is le húdair na n-ailt agus na léirmheasanna na tuairimi atá léirithe iontu agus ni gá go dtiocfaidh leis polaí Leabhair Pháistí Éireann.
In an Ireland that is so unfathomably changed since the last issue of Inis landed on your doormat, we hope that getting the magazine in the post brightens your morning and reminds you of the wonderfully strong and resilient community that you’re part of, connected by children’s books. During the global health pandemic caused by Covid-19, we have seen authors and illustrators taking to the internet to make sure that children and young people in their homes are staying creative. We have been buoyed by their readings, activities and most of all their generosity in giving of their time and talents. Find us on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn or sign up for our newsletter – we will be sharing great opportunities for everyone to get reading, drawing and telling stories.

This year we will not be able to celebrate our excellent authors and illustrators through the KPMG Children’s Books Ireland Awards ceremony as we had planned. But despite not being together in a room on 19 May, we will announce the winners and we will find new ways of celebrating the brilliant work for children and young people that has been created by the shortlistees. In this issue you’ll hear from the chair of the judging panel, Dr Ciara Ní Bhroin, with the judges’ views on the shortlist. Whether you can get your hands on these books through Libraries Ireland’s BorrowBox app, order them from an independent bookseller (visit http://iesltd.ie/ for 25% off!) or tune in to our social media to see and hear some very special readings, we hope you’ll agree that Irish children’s literature is in great health and is something we can be very proud of. Check out our article from Elizabeth Goldrick about Ireland’s Eye, a picturebook exhibition at The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art that brought Irish artists to a new international audience.

The irony of using so much screen time to bring us together and to encourage young people to read a book is not lost on us. In this issue, the UK’s Waterstones Children’s Laureate, Cressida Cowell, talks about the rights of young readers in her ‘Giant To-Do List’, including ‘See an author event at least ONCE’. We hope that one of the positive things about spending more time indoors over the coming months will be the proliferation of author and illustrator events available digitally for young readers. Access for young people is a concern shared by Jennie Ryan of MoLI, who has been inviting and welcoming young people through the museum’s doors since last September. In her conversation with Jane O’Hanlon, former Chair of Children’s Books Ireland among many other titles, she tells us about her own experiences of the arts as a young person and what she hopes to achieve at MoLI. Sadhbh Devlin tells us about her tenure as Writer-in-Residence at dlr LexIcon and how she plans to inspire young readers.

Inspiration is something that we can’t get enough of as we weather a challenging period in our history. We hope that within these pages you will find plenty to spark your curiosity and lead you to a book that may comfort, entertain, provoke thought or bring a smile when it’s most needed. From all of our team at Children’s Books Ireland, we send our best to our members and supporters, with much hope for what our July issue will bring.

Elaina Ryan
CEO Children’s Books Ireland
Cressida Cowell is the current Waterstones Children’s Laureate (2019–2021), the author and illustrator of the bestselling The Wizards of Once and How to Train Your Dragon books series, and the author of the Emily Brown picturebooks, illustrated by Neal Layton. Cressida is also an ambassador for the National Literacy Trust and the Reading Agency, a trustee of World Book Day and a founder patron of the Children’s Media Foundation. She has won numerous prizes, including the Gold Award in the Nestlé Children’s Book Prize.

by Helen Carr
Despite their huge global success (the Wizards of Once has been translated into thirty-seven languages and signed by DreamWorks Animation, while How to Train Your Dragon has sold over eight million books in thirty-eight languages and is a major DreamWorks Animation film franchise), it wasn’t her bestselling and long-running series that were my introduction to Cressida Cowell’s work. Rather, one decided, determined little character drew me in; I fell in love with Cressida’s work when reading the Emily Brown picturebook series to my little nephew. Emily is bolshie, lovable and adventurous and — along with the inventive use of language and Neal Layton’s artwork — makes the books irresistible. Cressida explained that she wanted ‘a very strong female picturebook character. Girls like to see themselves being strong and wise.’ She based Emily Brown on her daughter Maisie, who had a special dog called Mr Dog; their adventures inspired the adventures of Emily Brown and Stanley the rabbit. ‘He was one of those stuffed animals that she wouldn’t let go of. She lost Mr Dog was one of those stuffed animals that I knew he could do it because he just had such wonderful, imaginative, beautiful illustrations. When he first sent them back I hadn’t spoken to him about my sister — who’s called Emily and was another inspiration for Emily Brown — but the illustrations looked exactly like her when she was a kid! If you go with the right person, they’re going to know the heart of what you’re trying to say.’

After having her own picturebooks published back in the late nineties, Cressida moved to writing for older readers but took that visual sense with her — the importance of pictures and of making books fun, attractive and appealing is a theme that runs through all her books and her work as the Children’s Laureate. ‘Although picturebooks were my entry point, I always wanted to write for older readers as well. I really liked the idea of books that aren’t dumbed down in any way; very intelligent books — because all children are very intelligent — but accessible. Lively, exciting visuals are a real way in to books for kids.’

Cressida says that she thinks of her books as very long picturebooks and works on them accordingly when it comes to how she integrates the text and the artwork. ‘I didn’t really know that what you normally did was, you wrote the story and then you left these gaps for the illustrator to fill in — I treated it as a 300-page picturebook. The designer I was working with was open to that idea and nobody was really concentrating on what we were doing because I wasn’t an important author at that stage. Now I sit down with the lovely designer at Hodder and we design the whole thing together like it’s a giant jigsaw puzzle. It’s quite a complicated thing, but it makes it feel very organic.’

This process really shows in the finished books, which are alive with character and atmosphere, like an artist’s sketchbook. From the scratchy, humorous character drawings, full of personality and quirk, to the more brooding landscapes and scene-setting images, the books are a feast for the eyes with something to look at on almost every page.

Today there is so much media aimed specifically at children — TV, films, magazines, interactive games and screens — that young people are even more visually aware than they were in the past. Cressida is a great appreciator of film and TV and their ways of telling stories. The film version of How to Train Your Dragon was released in 2010, by which point the first eight books in the series had been published. While she sees them as completely separate things to the books, Cressida feels that watching the films had some effects on her subsequent books. ‘I do think that the emotional directness of the films was helpful to me. I’m very interested in humour, but sometimes humour is a way of distancing from emotion and I think that the books became more comfortable about not using humour as distancing and being prepared to be emotional in a more direct way because of the films.’

But despite the power of film, she’s determined to show kids that ‘books are their own thing’, and that’s there’s real, lasting magic in them too. Unlocking that enchantment, and helping kids to decode books and get to the joy within in the most painless way possible, is one of the main aims of her laureateship. ‘Books have something special and as laureate I talk about the magical powers of books that the screen isn’t quite as good at bringing out; films tell you how things are whereas books are partly what the writer puts down on the page and partly what the reader imagines.’

She points out that books are also wonderful for allowing readers to empathize with others: ‘Things on a screen happen “out there” — in a book they’re happening inside your head. It’s like “walking around in someone else’s skin”, to quote To Kill a Mockingbird. I’m always trying to overturn that feeling in a kid’s mind that reading might be like school, it might be hard. I want to make them realise they can read for the fun of it.’

Helping children to see that they can read for fun means empathising with them and trying to imagine what old-fashioned books, packed with unbroken text, must look like to a young reader. ‘I try to put myself in the mind of a kid and I think: how would I feel? When I look at a copy of The Financial Times, I think this isn’t for me. All that straight text — very, very dry looking. So I try to make my books the opposite of that. It’s so easy for a book to come to represent something that makes a child feel stupid even though they’re not, they’re really smart. Watch an episode of The Simpsons and you’ll see how smart kids are! But books need decoding — there’s no way to get round that — so it’s really easy for them to begin to represent something boring and that’s what I’m trying to get readers past. Particularly for kids who have any difficulty reading, the fact that you have the illustrations is kind of a payoff and it cuts through the text.’

Her approach is obviously working because, though her books are quite long, they obviously don’t daunt children at all — they fly through them: ‘I get kids who read the books from beginning to end in long...
When Cressida was writing the second book in The Wizards of Once, her father died. ‘I felt the sadness of that entered the book a bit. I’m a hopeful person and I wanted the narrative to be able to contain that, so I needed one more book. So I just extended the series to four.’

This unexpected change to the series shows how much a writer’s personal life can bleed into the books. ‘In order to move other people and for stories to resonate you have to put a lot of yourself into it. You put your own life experiences into a story even if it is fantasy and not at all autobiographical because that’s how other people recognise the emotional truth of your characters.’

At the heart of a lot of what Cressida writes about are children’s relationships with their parents; she says when she’s writing she’s thinking of a parent reading the books aloud with their child and exploring those emotions. ‘The relationship between Hiccup and Stoic [in How to Train Your Dragon] and between Cyclax and Wish and Intenso and Xar [in The Wizards of Once] are all about parents trying to work out their relationships with their children, and children with their parents.’

Cressida’s passion for reading, for books and for the experience of reading books together shines through and forms the backbone of her laureate role. She is determined to show children that books contain magic – and that that magic is for all of them, for every child. As laureate, she’s made a ‘Giant To-Do List’ outlining what every reader – every child – has a right to:

1. Read for the joy of it
2. Access NEW books in schools, libraries and bookshops
3. Have advice from a trained librarian or bookseller
4. Own their OWN book
5. See themselves reflected in a book
6. Be read aloud to
7. Have some choice in what they read
8. Be creative for at least 15 minutes a week
9. See an author event at least ONCE
10. Have a planet to read on

Everything on the list is important, but the first two points that Cressida is working on are libraries and creativity: ‘I have been arguing for more creative space to be put into the curriculum for a while and I’ve been asking the question, “Who would like a special book where for fifteen minutes every Friday, kids could write whatever they wanted, and the teachers won’t mark it? No rules, no marking, just fun?” The response from teachers and children has been overwhelmingly positive, so I’m going to be devising a practical plan to offer schools that helps develop children’s creative intelligence through writing and drawing. I’m also going to be asking my fellow authors and illustrators to spread the word with me. Let’s take magic seriously!’

Helen Carr has worked in publishing for over twenty years and is currently Senior Editor with The O’Brien Press. She has worked with many well-known children’s and YA authors and illustrators, as well as on many general titles for adults, from cookery to current affairs to sport. Helen has reviewed books for Inis magazine, the Sunday Independent and Best Books.
I went to meet Jennie Ryan, the learning manager with Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI), one morning in January. We had a wonderful chat and she showed me around the museum with great enthusiasm. I have tried to convey some of the things we spoke about, but the best way to learn about all that Jennie does is to visit MoLI and meet her yourself. It’s well worth the time, and she will give you a brilliant insight into just what can be achieved by a well-structured and planned visit to this museum of literature.

by Jane O’Hanlon
Can you tell me a little about your own background and how you came to work at MoLI?

I embrace an artistic and creative approach to learning and development motivated by a desire to assist people to translate the world around them in a way that is meaningful and relevant for their learning and development. I’ve spent the last twenty years of my professional career (and spare time) as a youth development worker and arts educator and practitioner focused on encouraging and fostering the imagination and creativity of young people, adults and the wider community and, in particular, harnessing young people’s natural curiosity for learning and fun through educational, artistic and cultural programming.

Above all, as a young person I felt the transformative effect of the arts, especially through stories and drama. I remember the first time I watched a TEAM theatre production about the famine. I was in primary school and was so engrossed in the story that I wanted to help the poor landlord get back his land, and then in the second act, the whole story was told from the tenants’ point of view – and this just blew my mind! I remember being so conflicted, and being able to empathise with both points of view, and feeling cheated that I didn’t hear the tenants’ story first! My curiosity was well and truly sparked and, on reflection, I realise that the arts awakened my imaginative development, curiosity and critical and creative thinking. And I have never ever forgotten that feeling!

So, with a scholarship from Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education, I graduated from Trinity College with a BA in Drama and Theatre Studies in 2000, at the same time as Axis arts and community centre was opening in Ballymun. I worked with thirty-two young people and directed the first production to open Axis Theatre and went on to become Arts Development Worker with Ballymun Regional Youth Resource. Before MoLI, I worked in a Sphere 17 – Regional Youth Service in Darndale, firstly, as a resident artist, setting up Adrenaline Youth Theatre, and then as a youth arts worker for over ten years. During that time I also took a sabbatical and worked as a script and story editor for children’s television with JAM Media.

Could you give me some background on MoLI itself and how it all began?

MoLI began in 2010 with conversations between the National Library of Ireland and University College Dublin around a creative alliance. A donation from Martin and Carmel Naughton helped to bring the idea of MoLI to fruition and, with the architects Scott Tallon Walker and exhibition designers Ralph Appelbaum Associates, plans began to transform Newman House’s Aula Maxima building into a ten-thousand-foot exhibition space, while also creating universal access across all the buildings of UCD’s original campus. Further funding was received from Fáilte Ireland and the builders arrived on site in October 2017. The museum opened to the public on 21 September 2019.

Could you give us a general overview of MoLI and how it came to have this name?

MoLI is set inside UCD’s Newman House, the original home of the college, where noted Irish writers such as James Joyce, Maeve Binchy and Kate O’Brien studied. The museum is named after the character Molly Bloom in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and it hosts a range of literary treasures from Ireland’s rich literary tradition.

Can you tell me what you do here in MoLI?

I am the learning manager here in MoLI. My role is to animate the museum and gardens in a creative, playful way that sparks curiosity, learning and engagement! At MoLI, we are committed to youth
creating – we have a large magnetic...
KPMG Children's Books Ireland Awards 2020

#ReadingHeroes

childrensbooksireland.ie
KPMG children’s books irland awards shortlist 2020

In many respects, 2019–20 has been a bumper year for Irish children’s books. Particularly welcome was the announcement by Children's Books Ireland of KPMG as the new title sponsor for their annual awards, which identify, honour and promote excellence in Irish writing and illustration for young people. The awards, now in their thirtieth year, are the leading annual children’s book awards in Ireland and are a valuable opportunity for national and international recognition of Irish authors and illustrators.

The increased funding that KPMG sponsorship brings means that the prize fund has doubled to €16,000, enabling greater financial support for artists and raising the profile of the awards. The Junior Juries scheme, involving juries of young readers around the island of Ireland, will be expanded this year, thanks to funding from the Ecclesiastical Movement for Good, another welcome development that will enable CBI to gift shortlisted books, provide specially designed activity packs and facilitate visits by authors and illustrators to twenty additional schools across Northern Ireland and the Republic, bringing the pleasures and benefits of reading to more children.

This year, the judging panel read a record ninety-eight books, including books in Irish and English in a variety of genres and formats ranging from picturebooks for the very young to fiction for young adults. Through a rigorous process of debate and deliberation over a six-month period, these were whittled down to a shortlist of ten titles, all deemed to exemplify the criteria for excellence that governed panel discussions: literary and artistic excellence, respect for young readers, the potential to engage and entertain young readers and to offer them a stimulating and satisfying experience that develops or challenges their inner lives, their sense of self or understanding of and engagement with the world.

The fact that three Irish language books on the shortlist are Sinéad O’Hart’s The Deepest Breath, Sarah Crossan’s The Star-Spun Web and Máire Ó Colla of a wry and quirky tale from oral Irish folklore, beautifully illustrated by Ashling Lindsay, is a recurring theme across all genres on the 2020 shortlist. The Tide, by Clare Helen Welsh and Ashling Lindsay, is a poignant and visually appealing portrayal of a young girl coming to terms with her grandfather’s dementia, while Muireann Ní Chiothlaí and Paddy Donnelly’s Scáine agus Smírín is a humorous depiction of a special bond between mother and child. In Madame Badobedah, written by Sophie Dahl and illustrated by Lauren O’Hara, an unexpected friendship develops between a curious young girl and a mysterious guest in her family’s hotel. Pictures by Polly Dunbar and text by Eoin McLaughlin work perfectly together in The Hug to relate a charming tale of two lonely characters who find friends in each other.

A notable feature of this year’s shortlist is the inclusion of three verse novels, an indication of the continuing flourishing of this genre. Meg Grehan’s The Deepest Breath, Sarah Crossan’s The Star-Spun Web and Máire Zepf’s Night is highly accomplished verse narratives with distinctive female voices that allow fertile gaps for readers to fill, while employing poetic language, cadence and suggestive use of white space in the positioning of words on the page. Noteworthy, too, is an increased representation of LGBTQ+ experience, an important development that reflects social and cultural changes in Ireland in recent times and allows more young people to see themselves in the books they read. All the Bad Apples by Moira Fowley-Doyle is an intriguing coming-of-age story that traces inherited trauma resulting from social prejudice and intolerance through generations of one family. Other titles on the shortlist are Sinéad O’Hart’s The Star-Spun Web, a riveting adventure story across parallel worlds, and Mór agus Muile, a lively retelling by John Og Hiúdaí Neidí O Colla of a wry and quirky tale from oral Irish folklore, beautifully illustrated by Kim Sharkey.

The shortlist presented here showcases excellence in Irish writing and illustration for young people. Many very accomplished and engaging books that attest to the quality and variety of Irish children’s literature did not make it to the shortlist. The fact that three Irish language books feature is indicative of the significant improvement in the quality of Irish language publishing for children in recent years. However, the shortlist also points to a need for more excellent books about young male characters. While the current emphasis on female subjectivity is to be celebrated in light of the privileging of male experience in Irish literature historically, it is important that all readers find excellent books in which they feel represented. Notwithstanding this, junior juries around the country have a wonderful treat in store and I wish all of them great enjoyment and pleasure in discovering and engaging with the shortlisted books.

Children’s Books Ireland are to be commended for their advocacy of excellence in children’s books over the three decades since the awards were first established in recognition of the importance of reading for young people, the positive impact of literacy on society and the essential role that authors and illustrators play in offering young people intellectual, emotional, aesthetic and imaginative experiences that illuminate and enhance their lives, while contributing to a rich literary and cultural heritage that we can proudly share with the wider world.

THE SHORTLIST

The Hug
by Eoin McLaughlin
and illustrated by Polly Dunbar

A charming picturebook of novel design that can be read from either end and concludes in the middle. Tortoise and Hedgehog, each lonely and in need of a hug, embark on separate quests that end when they happen upon each other. Tortoise’s hard shell and Hedgehog’s prickly pins do not deter the pair from hugging in a heart-warming double-page spread at the centre of the book. The texture, colours and facial expressions of the animal characters are superbly rendered, with pictures by Polly Dunbar and text by Eoin McLaughlin working in perfect tandem to engage and delight young readers.

The Tide
by Clare Helen Welsh
and illustrated by Ashling Lindsay

This poignant portrayal of a young girl coming to an understanding of her grandfather’s memory loss is uplifting and enlightening for child and adult readers alike. Exquisitely illustrated with a warm palette and a keen eye for pattern, its gentle rhythms mirror the ebb and flow of the
tide and the passage of time. A stunning double-page spread depicting the pair dancing in the orange glow of the full tide at sunset creates a glorious sense of harmony that assuages earlier moments of disquiet, while the warm presence of the mother, who features in most of the illustrations, provides reassurance and comfort throughout. An evocative portrait of intergenerational bonds.

**Scúnc agus Smúirín**  
by Muireann Ní Chiobháin and illustrated by Paddy Donnelly

When Scúnc finds his missing Teddy, he is dismayed to discover that its special smell has been eradicated by a spell in the washing machine. After much searching and sniffing, Scúnc makes the happy discovery that Teddy’s smell came from his mother’s hugs, so lots of hugging of Teddy will be required for the comforting smell to be regained. It is unusual to feature skunks as main characters in a picturebook and much is made in the illustrations of their comic indifference to the repulsion that their odour arouses in other animal characters trying to give them a wide berth. A warm, humorous and highly engaging celebration of love between mother and child.

**Mór agus Muilc**  
by John Óg Hiúdai Neidí Ó Colla and illustrated by Kim Sharkey

This is a stunning retelling in picture and text of an unusual and dark tale from oral Irish culture. The rhythmic repetition of dialogue as each new character is encountered and the beautiful curving lines in the sumptuous and evocative illustrations perfectly capture the circularity of the cumulative tale. A hypnotic sense of movement is created as a growing cast of wonderfully named characters join the elongated Mór and the jester-like Muilc in a dance towards their doom. Stylish, quirky and admirably faithful to the oral tradition.

**Madame Badobedah**  
by Sophie Dahl and illustrated by Lauren O’Hara

When an eccentric elderly lady with a mysterious past comes to stay at The Mermaid Hotel, the curious young daughter of the owners sees an opportunity for honing her skills in espionage. An unlikely friendship develops between the pair, leading to a shared fantastical adventure. Lauren O’Hara’s lively and characterful illustrations include wonderfully detailed doublespreads and humorous vignettes that perfectly complement this intriguing tale of first impressions, friendship and the power of imagination.

**The Deepest Breath**  
by Meg Grehan

A thoughtful, exquisitely gentle and heart-rending verse novel that explores with a superb lightness of touch important themes relating to anxiety, emerging sexual identity, friendship and love. The lyrical narrative captures with great delicacy the fragile voice of an eleven-year-old girl, whose feelings for her friend both excite and confuse her, as she seeks understanding and affirmation from her mother. The motif of water, of drowning and breathing, lends a dreamy atmosphere to this tender, courageous and ultimately uplifting story.

**The Star-Spun Web**  
by Sinéad O’Hart

This distinctive steam-punk-sci-fi fantasy adventure features an extraordinary heroine with a special talent for science, her endearing pet tarantula, a strange device that enables her to access other worlds and a colourful cast of unforgettable characters, including her male double in a parallel world. From the mysterious opening to the dramatic denouement, readers are brought on a rollercoaster journey of scientific exploration, intrigue, treachery and mortal danger. A captivating and original story that will excite and enthral young readers.

**Toffee**  
by Sarah Crossan

A lyrical and moving portrayal of the relationship between a teenage girl, who has run away from her abusive father, and an elderly woman with dementia, who mistakes her for a close childhood friend. Every note in this first person verse narrative rings true. Each poem is a gem in itself and they combine in a series of vignettes, employing a subtle interplay between information given and deferred that allows space for readers to reflect while savouring the beauty of the language. Through deft storytelling and masterful characterisation, complex themes of identity, child and elder abuse, memory loss, loneliness and connection are explored with sensitivity, honesty, warmth and respect.

**Nóinín**  
by Máire Zepf

A compelling verse novel that depicts, with beguiling subtlety and nuance, the online grooming of a shy teenage girl, the slow build-up to a shocking crime and the aftermath from the perspective of her best friend. The insidious nature of grooming through flattery, exploitation of teenage insecurities and isolation from friends is very convincingly portrayed. The effects of violent crime on the family and friends of the victim are shown and questions of blame considered, but the novel ends with an empowering manifesto on the right of young girls to full life and liberty. Rich imagery, poetic language and intertextual references to fairy tales and Irish myth lend resonance to this very modern and accessible tale of the dangers of social media. An artful and gripping narrative that will reward multiple re-readings.

**All the Bad Apples**  
by Moïra Fowley-Doyle

An atmospheric and powerful story tracing trauma through three generations of the same family. Alternating between the contemporary first-person narrative of Deena and the haunting story of her ancestors, it draws on dark aspects of Ireland’s history that have come to light in recent years relating to attitudes towards female sexuality and callous treatment of single mothers and their babies by the Catholic Church and wider society. After disastrously coming out to her family, Deena embarks on a road trip with friends in a quest that leads her to find her mother, her own voice and, ultimately, freedom from the family curse. The apple motif is cleverly woven into the story, in which themes of witchcraft and healing are linked with female agency and power.

Dr Ciara Ní Bhroin is chair of the 2020 judging panel and a lecturer in English Language Literacy and Literature in the Marino Institute of Education, an Associated College of Trinity College, Dublin. She is a former president of the Irish Society for the Study of Children’s Literature and served for many years on the committee of iBbY Ireland. Ciara has published numerous articles and book chapters on children’s literature.
fíorú na brionglóide

Conas mar atá an ról mar Scríbhneoir Cónaithe dlr LexIcon ag dul i bhfeidhm ar Shadbhbh Devlin

APRIL 2020
Nuair a bhí mé mó agus iarradh orm, mar a iartrar príshí go minic, cén post a bhí uaim nuair a d’fháisfainn suas, ba gnách liom rogha freagraí a thabhairt. Uaireanta, chuimh mé in iol go raibh mé chun dul ag tiomáint leorraithe. Is beag machnamh a rinne mé ar a bhfiór-obair atá i gcceist le lasa a iomparach ach i m'geist le lasa a iomparach ach i m'geist le gheart as a dhéanach agus ag codladh go sámh gach iochte sa chábhán beag seascair a chuir ruaidhmiú chuithiú na suíochán. Ní tháinig aon a bheadh agam!

Post eile a bhí uaim ná bheithe ‘cailiúil’. Anois, an fhadhb a bhí agam leis an ráteasa seo nó go n-iarradh na daoine fásta orm leathnú amach air. Conas a mbeadh ná cáiliúl? An raibh mó beaga beag seascair san rathú leis an ráteasa seo nó go n-iarradh na daoine fásta orm leathnú amach air?

An tríú post a bhí agam ar mo liosta ná leabharlannai. Bhí sé níos fearr ná post muinseach nach bhfuil an ról beag seascair ar chúl na suíochán. Ach, go ceann, shíl mé fós go mbeadh sásta go seachtraí bheith i rith a bheith agam!

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Táim féin-fohostaithe ó cuireadh ar iomarcaíocht mé féin agus mo chomhghleacaithe in 2014. Bhí mo sheanphost buan - go dhítheni féin agus mo chomhghleacaithe. Tá sé níos fearr ná cumhachtachtaí a cheart is cáiliúl dá raibh ann riamh.

Ní hamhain sin, ach tugann an rolil dochreidte agus seiseanaíocht dom nach bhfuil éasca teacht orthu mar scríbhneoir féin-fohostaithe.

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Ó thosaigh mé sa ról i mí Iúil 2019 bhí deis agam obuir é a ghrúpa éagsúla ata ar cheithre ansan ag an leabharlann ina gcéad for-ochtana, cosúil le teaghlach atá ag fulaingt easpá didine, pástí as bhfuil uachtas (ASD) orthu, agus teaghlach atá bhfuil Gaeilge acu mar thanga bhaile, mar an leas an bpbalo i gcóitinme. Tá ceardanna ceardaithe treoraithe agam, seisiúin seáltacaíochta cleachtadh chruthaiteach agus agus seisiúin seáltacaíochta as Gaeilge curtha i láthair agam. Bhi deis agam, freisin, obuir é le báile de Music Generation, a chuir tionlan an ceol le seacála atá a bháiléamh ag an ag an bhFéile Bia a bhí á rachtaíin in Eastáir Airfield i nDún Droma sa samhradh. Cé go bhfuilumise in ainm is a bheith aghaidh as deireadh nua a bhfuil uachtaí agus uaireanta, muid gach rud ó chaighdeán na Gaeilge go dhubh an meas a chloisteáil. Pléann mbainfidh siad pléisiúr as chomh maith. Luach atá le léamh na Gaeilge agus go bhfuil iad a spreagadh le go bhfeicfí an chosúil atá in ann a bhfuil an deas ar dásúil as chomh maith. Is fós atá le léamh na Gaeilge agus go bhfuil iad a spreagadh le go bhfeicfí an chosúil le feiceáil as a bheith áirithe a bheith ag oscailt. Cén aon leas a bhfuil sé níos fearr ná leas is mó is féidir a bhaint as, ní bheadh an am ná an am iomhain. Táim ag obair trí a bhfearthaíochta atá do bhfuil i ngAosraí agus ag un gheall air féin, agus a bheith ag obair liom ag siothchadh le leabharlann faisnéis a chruthú in Éirinn. Thosaigh sí ar a állann sa bhfás a bhí i mbunaithe ar thoradh na deireadh, a athrú leis an leabharlann a chur i gceannas leis. Táim ag obair le haghaidh Gaeilge, agus leis an leabharlann, a bheith an-dhearga leis an bhfuil an deas ar an leabharlann is mó cáil. Nuair a d'éag sí, ní bheadh an scéal a bhfuil air féin ag obair liom agus le linn na Gaeilge, ní bheadh an scéal a bhfuil air féin ag obair liom agus le linn na Gaeilge.
In 2002 The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art opened its doors – its mission is to inspire a love of art and reading through picturebooks. Last year Ireland’s Eye launched, an exhibition of Irish picturebook illustration.

by Elizabeth Goldrick
Eric Carle is the acclaimed and beloved creator of The Very Hungry Caterpillar (amongst many other classics), which has eaten its way into the hearts of literally millions of children all over the world. Since it was published in 1969, he has illustrated more than seventy books and more than 152 million copies of his books have sold around the world! In 2002 The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art opened its doors – its mission is to inspire a love of art and reading through picturebooks. In addition to underscoring the cultural, historical and artistic significance of picturebooks and their art form, it offers educational programmes that provide a foundation for arts integration and literacy. It also offers a number of internships. The Trinkett Clarke internship provides a unique opportunity for third- and fourth-year college and graduate-level students interested in pursuing careers in the arts and/or museums to gain practical experience within a nationally renowned museum dedicated to the art of the picturebook. The primary project outcome of the internship is the organisation of a thematic exhibition in the museum’s Reading Library. Elizabeth Goldrick was the Trinkett Clarke intern at The Eric Carle Museum of the Picture Book Art in 2019.

‘One Sunday morning the warm sun came up and – pop – out of the egg came a tiny and very hungry caterpillar.’ Even when removed from the rectangular form of its picturebook frame, the words immediately conjure the vivid collaged images of Eric Carle’s most famous creation, The Very Hungry Caterpillar. As a child I read the book so often, first with help and later alone, that the caterpillar never fully left my consciousness. The critter re-emerged in my early twenties, in my first career move as an English teacher in a Spanish primary school. The bug was back when I swapped my grown-up life in London for a year as an assistant at a Baltimore County library and boarded a bus for nine hours to spend in the laundry-room basement of a friend’s home searching and applying for jobs that somehow involved books. My applications fell into three categories: tolerable, attainable and aspirational. The latter category included a summer internship at The Eric Carle Museum of the Picture Book Art, sent and, though not forgotten, put to one side as I continued my efforts.

It would be two months; four job interviews and one job start later before I would hear from the Carle Museum. Job seeking had me quite numbed by this point but the great warmth and interest both Ellen Keiter (chief curator) and Courtney Waring (education director) showed in me, my ideas, education and cultural perspective, during my interview, revived me. The space and opportunity they described was the Golden Ticket and, though hopeful, I knew I had to remain realistic in my aspirations. When I was offered the internship some weeks later, I screamed at such a pitch that I ruined any chance of being accepted by the cats in my house-share. On 21 June, fittingly the longest day of the year, I left my role as an assistant at a Baltimore County library and boarded a bus for nine hours to begin my adventures in Amherst, Western Massachusetts.

The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art has called Amherst home since 2002. Almost too pretty to comprehend, Amherst is a valley town in Western Massachusetts and former residents include Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost. Eric Carle and his late wife, Bobbi, founded the museum after visiting various picturebook museums in Japan. The Carle honours the picturebook’s artistic and educational value, inviting visitors from around the world to enter a space of nostalgia, creativity and possibility. The museum has three galleries with rotating exhibitions, one of which is always dedicated to exploring an element of Eric Carle’s work. The other galleries have displayed diverse exhibitions celebrating artists including Tomi Ungerer and Maurice Sendak and thematic studies such as the image of the child in American picturebooks. Children’s book illustrators are woefully under-appreciated, and the Carle spotlights their artistry. The picturebook is also celebrated as a living medium in the reading library and the art studio. The library is the museum’s living room. Light, spacious and populated exclusively by picturebooks, shelved alphabetically by illustrator, visitors can explore books in the comfort of a sofa or couch. The art studio is an open maker space. Every six weeks a new art project begins and each day visitors are introduced to the current activity and invited to contribute.

Much of the vibrancy of the Carle comes from its team of thirty-five or so full- and part-time employees. Internships are also available for students and graduates keen to develop skills. My internship was founded in memory of Trinkett Clark. Trinkett was the unique treasure her name implies: a curator, artist historian and scholar of many interests, including children’s illustration. When she passed in 2006, Nick Clark, the museum’s original director and Trinkett’s husband, established an internship programme to celebrate her curious spirit. I was the thirteenth intern fortunate to benefit from eight weeks working with the education and curatorial team.

My first days were a whirl, finding myself absorbed into the cheerful machinations of the team. The openness and dynamism they shared was encouraging, and questions and opinions flowed naturally as I was introduced to the various roles and the museum space. My days alternated between public-facing and back-office projects. In the art studio, I encouraged guests to find inspiration from the materials and exhibition spaces around them and to engage in our daily art project. In the Carle library I introduced our visitors to different texts, assisted them as they searched for tales or illustrators that were old favourites and suggested new titles to deepen their interests. I led a weekly story-time session, using the whole book approach favoured by the Carle, drawing the participants into all elements of the imagery and text the book provided. With the curatorial team I learned more about the precision and detail of art care and the steps in curating a show.

The main project of my internship was to curate a small exhibition of digital reproductions for display in the museum’s reading library. I was given the general...
Fuschia MacAree. Margaret Anne Suggs’s Conroy and Aga Grandowicz bookended other illustrators shared images inspired artists and poets for centuries. Houlihan, an entry point into the idealised the mythical character of Cathleen Ni

Thus, the bold, but, as our picturebooks do not avoid I included a jewel-toned Harry Clarke illustration of the Snow Queen from the Hans Christian Andersen tale. It was an Ireland and England was not my intention

...enthralling and terrifying. I decided to explore the Irish picturebook, aiming to introduce Ireland – the place, culture and people – through illustration. Often fielding questions on what was considered the ‘classic’ Irish children’s book – to which I still do not have a definitive answer – this was a space where I could attempt at last to craft an answer.

To give an overview of the richness and diversity in style and inspiration existing within Irish picturebooks, I wanted to include work from a variety of artists, past and contemporary. The Ireland I know is one of coming and going and, to reflect this, I reached out to artists native to the island, living in Ireland or abroad, along with illustrators who had found a home or inspiration in Ireland. Generally, stories we tell or paint for children, real or notional, profess something of our own values, ideals or wishes for the future. In contacting a variety of artists and asking them to share some of their work, I hoped to share some of these themes.

Quite quickly my inbox filled with warm responses and themes naturally emerged. Different interpretations of fairy and traditional tales became the first section. I included a jewel-toned Harry Clarke illustration of the Snow Queen from the Hans Christian Andersen tale. It was complemented by a contemporary pen and ink drawing of a powerful woman clothed in powerful armoury by Karen Vaughan, the reimagined Cinderella of Deirdre Sullivan’s creation from Tangleweed and Brine. Renderings of tales from Ireland’s rich fairy and folk tales included Conor Busuttil’s 2019 interpretation of The Children of Lir. His detailed watercolour swans wear jewellery throughout, allowing the reader to track the children in their feathered entrapment. P.J. Lynch contributed an image from Oscar Wilde’s The Selfish Giant, where one can almost feel the cold wind through his fine brushstrokes. Entering into the complex political relations between Ireland and England was not my intention but, as our picturebooks do not avoid such topics, nor could I. Thus, the bold, graphic shapes of Fatti Burke introduced the mythical character of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, an entry point into the idealised republicanism that has engaged many Irish artists and poets for centuries.

Other illustrators shared images inspired by Ireland’s natural world. Owls from Don Conroy and Aga Grandowicz bookended images of rain from Tatjana Feaney and Fuschia MacAree. Margaret Anne Suggs’s
dotey Pigin bathing at Howth Head and a worried-looking George from Chris Haughton’s Oh No George! inserted a gentle whimsicality. Notions of Irishness were captured in the tone of the images. The playfulness the Irish have with words came through in a spread from Oliver Jeffer’s The Incredible Book Eating Boy, where his character is shown progressing from initial feelings of vague queasiness to a more violent need to be sick. He succeeds in making the northern Irish colloquialism ‘boke’, to be sick, quite clear to the reader. America celebrates St Patrick’s Day more ardently than Ireland, so including a St Patrick’s Day image seemed essential. Tarsila Krüse’s colorful modern spread in My Little Album of Dublin, which includes a sunglasses-wearing Patrick plus an older lady draped in a gay pride flag, showed some of the various outlooks within our current culture where opinions and traditions are shifting.

A theme that seems to come through in many Irish children’s books is a sense of place and the home. Many tales, traditional and modern, insert the surreal into real spaces. My colleagues loved The President’s Glasses by Peter Donnelly, taking a bird’s-eye view of Dublin with the Pigeon. Similarly, Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick’s endpapers from The New Kid, where Cobh’s colourful ‘Deck of Cards’ terraced houses may be seen, was met with great delight.

Once the images had been collected, I then began to write a ‘chat’ to accompany each of them. These I intended as guides or signposts, communicating something within the image or theme to spark curiosity in the viewer and encourage them to read the text from which they were taken. Art is incredibly personal, and art created for children’s books perhaps even more so. When communicating with the illustrators, many had shared anecdotes with me. Andrew Whitson, for example, had told me how the idea for Cogito, an Irish-language picturebook that follows a young girl as she journeys to find her shadow, had taken root when he and his wife adopted a young daughter.

His creation reflects the confusion and disorientation he imagined she experienced. While not included in his label, I think the deep sentiment that underpinned the creation of this image comes through to the viewer.

Sending the high-quality digital resolution images to the printer required a not insignificant amount of trust and faith. Colours and shadows can be lost when things are reproduced. However, I was quite pleased on seeing the images – removed from their text, the artistry was apparent and their place on gallery walls indisputable. Electing how to hang the images was important, ensuring one image and story ran into another agreeably. Fortunately, I had a very accomplished Carle colleague help me with collating and hanging the imagery. Her experience and dry wit were of equal importance in making the images fit just as they should.

My last day of the Carle was the launch date for the exhibition. I presented the collected works to my colleagues and my initial nerves faded as their interest was clear and the art guided my talk. I loved the questions my colleagues asked – one, for instance, had expected more fairies: I told her ours were not of the winged and comely variety, but instead shape-shifting tricksters, hidden in plain sight.

I was rather devastated when the internship came to an end but I had a true sense of completion. As I left the museum, I waved goodbye to all twenty-seven of the images, telling them to behave. Kindly, my Carle colleagues have kept in touch, passing on anecdotes or comments overheard from visitors. Over these past months Irish visitors have come to see the exhibition, friends of some of the artists amongst them. Visitors have been encouraged to read more, checking out some of the books in the library or buying them at the museum shop. Other visitors have also asked questions or suggested illustrators that could also have been included, highlighting that the Irish illustration scene is being seen and heard all the way across the world in Western Massachusetts.

Elizabeth Goldrick holds an MPhil in Children’s Literature from Trinity College Dublin. She formerly worked at Tales for Tadpoles, an independent bookstore celebrating illustration in Dublin. She spent most of 2019 in the USA, where she worked in bookish locations, namely The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, a branch of the Baltimore County Public Library and at a middle school library.
reviews/léirmheasanna

The beauty of deciding that spring starts in February is that by the time this issue arrives in your hands you will have diligently cleaned and cleared all the bookshelves in sight. Here at Inis towers we know that nature and book-lovers abhor a vacuum, so it is with great delight that we bring you a fresh crop of tomes to replenish your shelves.

Fans of poetry, rejoice! This is your issue, with plenty of wonderful collections ‘for the young and young at heart’ as Gabriel Rosenstock’s Katie puts it so effortlessly. Joseph Coelho will help all the poets in their unique cultural and personal identities? and collide with one another. Readers can follow several narrative towers Inis bookshelves in sight. Here at Inis.

In Everybody Counts, Kristin Roskifte has taken a light-handed approach to the problem. Her vibrant counting book goes from 0 to 7.5 billion, illustrating the everyday lives of people as they connect and collide with one another. Read about the_escéal foaoi chiardeas idir madra fain agus teifeach óg ón Síria. Rachaidh an leabhar go mór i bhfeidhm ort. Tá leagan nua den seanscéal Éadaoin agus Mír ar fáil sa leabhar alainn nuálach An Féileacán agus an Rí le Máire Zepf, maisithe ag Shona Shirley Macdonald. Agus is féidir An Capall agus a Ghiolla le C.S. Lewis a léamh as Gaeilge anois a bhfuil le daoine an aistriúcháin, Antain Mac Lochlann.

Recent events have probably left us all more in need of deep breaths and mindfulness than ever before, not to mention searching for ways to spend our time at home. We hope you’ll find solace and amusement in reading. A big thanks to all the authors, illustrators, publishers, booksellers, and librarians, for creating the magical things that are books and putting them in our (carefully washed) hands.

Juliette and Siobhán

I draobh liríocht Ghaeilge na n-óg de, is í Máire Zepf an scríbhneoir is buiséala san aonóir haois is fiche. Tá cuid mhaith bunsaothar do pháiste do fhlíthe aici, agus tá sí ag taraingte as toibh na miotaseolaiocha anois.

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In a world of increasing walls, isolation and a growing mistrust of strangers, many of us hope to preach the mantra that we are all one people on one planet with more connections between us than differences. But how do you illustrate this simply? How do you show what brings us all together, while respecting that we also enjoy our unique cultural and personal identities?

In Everybody Counts, Kristin Roskifte has taken a light-handed approach to the problem. Her vibrant counting book goes from 0 to 7.5 billion, illustrating the everyday lives of people as they connect and collide with one another. Readers can follow several narrative lines or use suggestions at the back of the book and see how characters pop up in one another’s lives all the time. Keen observers will find other characters and can make up their own stories too.

Roskifte is an award-winning Norwegian illustrator. She keeps the text spare, as the fun of this seek-and-find book is to make your own discoveries. But she also directs the reader to find, for example, who is lonely, who is dreading football or who will become prime minister. The possibilities, like the number of people in the world, just keep on coming.

Rather than being frightened by the vastness of the world’s population, Everybody Counts makes easy connections at a level that grows quite naturally. We intersect with strangers in so many ways. They are, perhaps, only friends we haven’t properly met yet. This book would work very well in class discussions for all ages. 5+

Jan Winter
D’Aquino’s telling of artist Ruth Asawa’s life and craft is a book for all ages, imbued with a sense of wonder, space and appreciation. Asawa’s early years exploring and working with her family on the farm feel unhurried. There is a sense of wonder and quiet industry. We see an earnest receptiveness in Ruth’s unfurrowed brow.

As Ruth turned the mosaic landscape in her hands, she saw new ways to grow, cultivate and create. She sourced inspiration widely in college, through dance, philosophy and science, seeing shapes in thought and in movement. All the while it is clear that she is happy; there is a sense of enjoyment and appreciation as Asawa asks questions of herself and her world.

Every page is natural, authentic and rich, illustrated with charcoal and coloured-pencil drawings, combined with hand-painted and monoprinted paper. The aesthetic captures the sense that Asawa took in and stepped back from her sources of inspiration, weaving space and time into her wire-work so that it might take on this characteristic expansiveness.

There is a beautiful dichotomy visualised in the book, where Ruth is depicted looking closely and usually downward, at a dog or flower or her work itself, while those who view her art stand back and look up. Her lifetime of paying close attention has resulted in art far more significant than the sum of its parts. This inspiring and comforting, interesting and beautiful book invites us to read, see and try Asawa’s process. All ages

Finally, a book that provides children with the proper instructions to become a lion! Your reader will be in good paws – I mean hands – as the teacher of this seven-step diploma is a professional lion with certification from Harvard School of Claw. Once you are correctly attired in your lion outfit, you will go through a rigorous and demanding course, which includes lion-specific stretches, like downward lion, as well as looking fierce and sustained roaring. A fully illustrated menu gives lion diet choices, and it is worth noting that lions do not like spaghetti. Activities, including hiding and pouncing, are suggested to truly develop your inner lion.

For younger readers, this is an action-packed book that will have them prowling and roaring, but it is, however, the last step of this intensive course that makes the biggest impact. The true meaning of what it is to be a lion is to always look out for your friends.

Jon Agee

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Little foodies are in for a treat in this joyful celebration of mealtimes. From breakfast through to dinner, babies and toddlers are encouraged to pour, peel, chop and slice their way through a stunning array of culinary favourites, lifting flaps and pushing sliders to help prepare for each mini feast!

Every interactive page features just one or two elements, allowing little ones the time to really explore and devour what’s in front of them. The use of sliding tabs to show toast being buttered, or a decadent piece of chocolate cake being sliced, is nothing short of magical, the changing state of foodstuffs cleverly mirroring what children see in the real world. The pizza wheel deserves special mention: spinning round to reveal an endless reel of colourful toppings, it is not only hugely inventive, but also seriously robust – clearly designed with repetitive use and excitable little hands in mind.

Strong design and production values lie at the heart of this wondrous little book. The stylish illustrations are retro in nature, with flashes of 1960s-inspired patterns and polka dots peppered throughout. Foster also utilises colour to maximum effect, using a fresh palette for each spread and selecting one or two key colours that help lift her tasty wares right off the page.

This is a book to be savoured again and again. But be warned – reading it will most definitely lead to feelings of hunger. Have your snacks close to hand! 0–4

Lindsay Quayle

Andrea D’Aquino

A LIFE MADE BY HAND: THE STORY OF RUTH ASAWA
PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS
SEPTEMBER 2019, HARDBACK, 34PP, €12.99
ISBN 9781616898366

Jon Agee

LION LESSONS
SCALLYWAG PRESS, FEBRUARY 2020
HARDBACK, 32PP, £12.99
ISBN 9781912650200

Jane Foster

JANE FOSTER’S LET’S EAT!
TEMPLAR BOOKS, JANUARY 2020
BOARD BOOK, 10PP, £9.99
ISBN 9781787414082

Olivia Hope

Andrea D’Aquino

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As Ruth turned the mosaic landscape in her hands, she saw new ways to grow, cultivate and create. She sourced inspiration widely in college, through dance, philosophy and science, seeing shapes in thought and in movement. All the while it is clear that she is happy; there is a sense of enjoyment and appreciation as Asawa asks questions of herself and her world.

Every page is natural, authentic and rich, illustrated with charcoal and coloured-pencil drawings, combined with hand-painted and monoprinted paper. The aesthetic captures the sense that Asawa took in and stepped back from her sources of inspiration, weaving space and time into her wire-work so that it might take on this characteristic expansiveness.

There is a beautiful dichotomy visualised in the book, where Ruth is depicted looking closely and usually downward, at a dog or flower or her work itself, while those who view her art stand back and look up. Her lifetime of paying close attention has resulted in art far more significant than the sum of its parts. This inspiring and comforting, interesting and beautiful book invites us to read, see and try Asawa’s process. All ages

Elizabeth O’Brien

Jon Agee

LION LESSONS
SCALLYWAG PRESS, FEBRUARY 2020
HARDBACK, 32PP, £12.99
ISBN 9781912650200

Finally, a book that provides children with the proper instructions to become a lion! Your reader will be in good paws – I mean hands – as the teacher of this seven-step diploma is a professional lion with certification from Harvard School of Claw. Once you are correctly attired in your lion outfit, you will go through a rigorous and demanding course, which includes lion-specific stretches, like downward lion, as well as looking fierce and sustained roaring. A fully illustrated menu gives lion diet choices, and it is worth noting that lions do not like spaghetti. Activities, including hiding and pouncing, are suggested to truly develop your inner lion.

For younger readers, this is an action-packed book that will have them prowling and roaring, but it is, however, the last step of this intensive course that makes the biggest impact. The true meaning of what it is to be a lion is to always look out for your friends.

Jon Agee’s story has all the hallmarks of a classic picturebook and is instantly appealing to young readers with its clean storyline and tight, comedically expressive art. This fantastic story about the merits of practising being brave is sure to bring out the inner lion in every little reader. 0–4

Olivia Hope

Jane Foster

JANE FOSTER’S LET’S EAT!
TEMPLAR BOOKS, JANUARY 2020
BOARD BOOK, 10PP, £9.99
ISBN 9781787414082

Little foodies are in for a treat in this joyful celebration of mealtimes. From breakfast through to dinner, babies and toddlers are encouraged to pour, peel, chop and slice their way through a stunning array of culinary favourites, lifting flaps and pushing sliders to help prepare for each mini feast!

Every interactive page features just one or two elements, allowing little ones the time to really explore and devour what’s in front of them. The use of sliding tabs to show toast being buttered, or a decadent piece of chocolate cake being sliced, is nothing short of magical, the changing state of foodstuffs cleverly mirroring what children see in the real world. The pizza wheel deserves special mention: spinning round to reveal an endless reel of colourful toppings, it is not only hugely inventive, but also seriously robust – clearly designed with repetitive use and excitable little hands in mind.

Strong design and production values lie at the heart of this wondrous little book. The stylish illustrations are retro in nature, with flashes of 1960s-inspired patterns and polka dots peppered throughout. Foster also utilises colour to maximum effect, using a fresh palette for each spread and selecting one or two key colours that help lift her tasty wares right off the page.

This is a book to be savoured again and again. But be warned – reading it will most definitely lead to feelings of hunger. Have your snacks close to hand! 0–4

Lindsay Quayle
Bob is back again! *Bob Goes Pop* is the follow-up to award-winning author Marion Deuchar’s charming series *Bob the Artist* and *Bob’s Blue Period*. Bob has seen plenty of tribulations during his time on our pages. First, teased for his scrawny legs, then, his best friend, Bat, leaves him. Bob *bocht*! This time, it’s no different; there’s a new artist in town and he’s shaking things up. Bob has competition! Will it end in crisis or will Bob learn from his rival?

Children’s books’ target audience, you may know, is children. Crazy, right? The Bob series, however, is particularly child friendly. From the scrawling typography to the buoyant illustrations and the wacky language (*ShuttlebuttleKnickKnockscuddle* anyone?) *Bob Goes Pop* appears as though it could have been written by a child. A very talented child, at that! The book is bursting with colour; images leap from the page. Deuchars has wonderful fun challenging the reader’s perception of shape and size – is that duck really big or is that bird just tiny? It is a carnival of fun! Besides the fun, there is a gentle message of friendship at the heart of this story. Why work against someone when you can work with them? Will the two artists learn to paint together? At the end of the day, doesn’t friendship bring the brightest colour to our world? 0–4, 5–7

**Katie: Poems for the Young and Young at Heart**

That this book shares my name in its title perhaps makes my immediate admiration for it slightly biased … but regardless of namesake, I am sure that it will bring enjoyment to all.

This little book of poems begins with a handwritten preface from Katie, eight-year-old granddaughter of Fitzmaurice: ‘Grandad you have loads of jobs but the best you have is being my grandad’, accurately setting the tone for the poems that follow. Each short work illustrates the special relationship between grandparent and grandchild, offering an insight into both the mind of the child and the adult through alternating perspectives. The simplicity of the language used helps to create a sense of playful humour that seamlessly bridges the age gap between these points of view – proving what it truly means to be young at heart.

The specialness of this book is found in the emotions that each poem conveys, from unconditional love to the irritable tantrums of the Terrible Twos. Fitzmaurice eloquently captures the everyday life that he shares with his granddaughter during the first five years of her life – a celebration of the simple reasons to be happy and a declaration of deeply personal yet universally relatable memories of childhood. A sweet, humble and heart-touching read. Poetry, 0–4, 5–7

**Would You Like a Banana?**

An anonymous narrator does their utmost to convince a hungry gorilla to eat a banana. It’s offered up in a bun, in a cup, upside down or right way up. But no! This stubborn gorilla is having none of it. Under no circumstances will they eat a banana. Unless …

In this latest offering from the wonderful Ismail, a mirror is well and truly held up to the world of fussy eaters. With its subtle humour and childish emotions, the interplay between patient narrator and tenacious gorilla will strike a chord with families for whom mealtime battles are the norm.

Even if they don’t relate to Gorilla, little ones will love the playful story – particularly if it’s brought to life with expressive voices and plenty of stroppy arm-folding. The text has a strong rhythm and a repetitive structure that’s perfect for engaging young children. They’ll be champing at the bit to shout ‘I won’t eat a banana’ by the end of page 2!

In a move away from her recent illustrative style, Ismail juxtaposes the bold figure of her protagonist against a backdrop of extravagant, colourful shapes and photographs of oversized foods. This slightly surreal world is visually striking, if a little random – but then again, in a child’s world, anything is possible. And beneath all of the madness lies a simple message. Gorilla may be exhausting and fickle, but he (or she) has a voice. And perhaps, left to make their own choices, little people, like Gorilla, may just come around in the end. 0–4, 5–7
Kate Milner

IT’S A NO-MONEY DAY
BARRINGTON STOKE, OCTOBER 2019
PAPERBACK, 32PP, £6.99
ISBN 9781781128817

Mum works really hard, but sometimes there is no money left and no food in the cupboards. Today is one of those days and a visit to the local food bank is required. Mum feels ashamed to have to rely on the kindness of others, but her young daughter can only see the positives in everything that can be done on a ‘no-money day’.

Kate Milner’s book is a child’s eye view of everyday poverty in modern society, giving a sensitive insight into the necessity for food banks. The contrasting feelings of mother and daughter are palpable as the succinct text and accompanying illustrations portray the range of emotions experienced by both as they go about the rituals of their day.

From the mother we sense the embarrassment of not being able to provide the basic necessities, and from the daughter we see the fun to be had from filling ‘no-money days’ with visits to the charity shop, library and, of course, the local food bank.

Kate Milner was awarded the Klaus Flugge Prize for the most promising newcomer to children’s picturebook illustration in 2018 for My Name Is Not Refugee, which tackles the task of explaining the refugee crisis in a simple picturebook format. Using a similar approach, and clearly inspired by Kate’s role as an active campaigner, this look at the day to day lives of society’s most vulnerable is hugely affecting and moving throughout.

This is a powerful read that will prompt discussion and debate from young readers, an essential part of encouraging understanding and empathy with this beautifully told, topical and true to life story. 0–4, 5–7

Brenda Frawley

Mary Murphy

WHAT I LIKE MOST
WALKER BOOKS, OCTOBER 2019
HARDBACK, 28PP, £12.99
ISBN 9781406369045

From the opening endpaper with its lavish image of pink cherry-blossoms, to the closing endpaper of that same tree bedecked in copper and bronze autumnal leaves, this book is a feast of delights. Both Mary Murphy’s words and Zhu Cheng-Liang’s images are rich with poetic sensibility. The text opens with Murphy’s young narrator boldly asserting that what she likes most in the world is her window and its view. But as the pages turn, other ‘likes’ pop into her mind, and the reader is pulled into marvellously different and unexpected sources of joy and happiness.

Although Murphy uses the word ‘like’, it is clear that what is being explored is ‘love’. Zhu Cheng-Liang’s illustrations are lavish with love. He has created idealistic and endearing scenes of urban harmony, and also gorgeous images of children from many ethnicities playing together peacefully in wild settings among wild creatures. Every scene returns our eye to the gorgeous and beloved features of life, while Murphy’s text continues, page after page, to stir the heart and remind us of what we love most.

The final reveal brings us to the comforting conclusion that what the little girl likes ‘the very, very most in the world’ is her mother. Ultimately, this charming book supports and strengthens the special bond between mother and child, making it an ideal gift for all mums and their young children, but a more risky book, perhaps, for those whose main caretaker is not their mother. 0–4, 5–7

Grace Wells

Andrew Roycroft

Nikki McClure

WHAT WILL THESE HANDS MAKE?
ABRAMS, FEBRUARY 2020
HARDBACK, 40PP, £14.99
ISBN 9781419725760

Compelling illustrations and a message of generous creativity combine in this stunning book about how our hands can help and nurture. Nikki McClure’s consummate skill as a cut-paper artist brings a bold world into being, vivid and striking in the sense of energy and movement captured on every page.

The message of the text is every bit as vibrant, encouraging young readers to consider how they can use the manual skills they have for the benefit of others. All stripes of kindness and creativity are encouraged here, from cutting carrots to baking cakes, from carving wood to creating spaces for community and mutual safety. The illustrations are both immediate in impact and intricate in styling, meaning that the reader can repeatedly drink in each page, finding new detail and dimension each time.

Children will undoubtedly be captivated by the feel and flavour of the text, while parents, carers and teachers will delight in a resource that celebrates and nurtures kindness in a unique way. A beautiful text in message and medium with important and urgent lessons to share. 0–4, 5–7

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Grace Wells

Andrew Roycroft

Nikki McClure
Ulf Nilsson
Illustrated by Eva Eriksson
ALL THE DEAR LITTLE ANIMALS
GECKO PRESS, JANUARY 2020
PAPERBACK, 57PP, £7.99
ISBN 9781776572823

Profound themes of bereavement, grief and recovery are woven into a seemingly simple story about three friends who take responsibility for burying little animals who have died. In the timeframe of a single day, each character takes their part in finding, burying and eulogising creatures whose death means little to those around them. Particularly touching are the little poems penned by the first-person narrator, which are simple, elegant and emotionally candid in how they mark loss and pave a way to move through it.

Children will immediately relate to the whimsy of the work that the three friends devote themselves to, but will also pick up on the deeper themes of love and loss, friendship and funeral rites, and the need to come together to face big things. Eva Eriksson’s illustrations gently convey the pastoral world Ulf Nilsson has created, resulting in a text that is visually and emotionally evocative.

A disarming book in form and substance that will delight children and adults alike and provide an unpretentious space for themes of death, loss and hope to be explored in a healthy way. Highly recommended. 0–4, 5–7

Paul Staunton

Rachel Rooney
Illustrated by Zehra Hicks
THE PROBLEM WITH PROBLEMS
ANDERSEN PRESS, MARCH 2020
HARDBACK, 32PP, £12.99
ISBN 9781783448715

Written by award-winning children’s poet Rachel Rooney and illustrated by Zehra Hicks, The Problem with Problems is a brightly coloured, funny, one-of-a-kind picturebook that introduces children to what problems are.

Appearing as strange monsters, problems are shown as coming in all shapes and sizes that can turn up anytime and anywhere. Hicks has created a collection of strange and colourful problem creatures that have a childlike quality to them. They complement Rooney’s rhyming text well, which is perfect for reading aloud. Despite the seriousness of the topic, humour can be found throughout the text and in the illustrations.

Most importantly, the book shows children how to deal with problems, especially by sharing them.

This is a great resource for parents, guardians and teachers to have when they suspect a child is having a tough time with something. However, even if a child doesn’t have any issues, The Problem with Problems is still a bright, funny read for younger readers. 0–4, 5–7

Paul Staunton

AJ Wood and Mike Jolley
Illustrated by Allan Sanders
SEARCH-AND-FIND A NUMBER OF NUMBERS
WIDE EYED EDITIONS, JANUARY 2020
HARDBACK, 48PP, £12.99
ISBN 9781786035363

What a welcome return from the team behind Search-and-Find The Alphabet of Alphabets, with this new book focusing on numbers. It is as jam-packed and fun as the original, but instead of finding objects beginning with a specific letter, readers must find different amounts of things. This includes finding thirteen different creepy things in a haunted house, making sure there are two of every animal on Noah’s Ark and matching each of America’s fifty states to their two-letter code.

A Number of Numbers contains twenty-six different spreads showing diverse scenes such as a construction site, a Mystery Express train and a crazy golf course. The pages are wonderfully illustrated by Sanders, whose sense of style and colour results in every spread being unique but recognisable. Children will enjoy how interactive this book is, as they search and find and count. As in the last book, readers will also endeavour to spot a little white mouse on each page. There is so much other stuff happening that children could spend hours combing through the book. Visual jokes appear throughout and will appeal to both young and old.

Yet again, kudos to Wide Eyed Editions for continuing to publish such high-quality children’s picturebooks. Non-fiction, 0–4, 5–7

Paul Staunton
The latest picturebook from creator Mary Murphy is an exploration of the world and our place in it and how everyone and everything a child can imagine belongs and is valued, both as itself and as a part of various communities, societies and systems.

Bold images and striking colours offer a seemingly simple visual narrative to the reader, but one that supports deeper reading and more complex ideas than might first appear. The child’s perspective is prioritised here with a surprising amount of detail available to be perceived. One particular spread depicts a young girl dancing under a sky full of birds; the figure of the little girl seems utterly free and liberated in her environment while her movements mirror those of the birds above her. Only birds know how to be birds and only little girls know how to be little girls; but our imaginations allow us to conceive and dream of what it might be like to be someone or something else.

Murphy is attempting to engage with a fundamentally essential emotional idea here: that our differences are what make us who we are and those differences are beautiful. This is a celebration of uniqueness and of commonality, of individuals and animals belonging together in a world that holds endless potential for wonder and kindness.

This is the kind of picturebook that will lead to important conversations about identity, what it means to belong and our capacity for empathy and imagination. A delicate and simple message delivered effectively and with an accessible visual flair. 2–4, 5–8

Antoinette Fennell
Mindfulness is a concept that adults may be familiar with: understanding how we think and react to our own thoughts. But how do you explain this to young children? In this truly outstanding book by Trigger Publishing (who specialise in mental health and mental wellbeing), we have a child who sees her thoughts manifested in the form of a puppy called Ollie.

The wonderful thing about taking something as familiar as a puppy’s different behaviours and relating them to recognisable emotions is that a child not only has a simpler way of discussing thoughts and feelings but, more importantly, the puppy will give your little reader the tools to identify and deal with more difficult thoughts and emotions. Gravel’s comic-art style of illustration shows Ollie the puppy having fun, but when Ollie is loud or barky and is feeling anxious, the child takes out a magic invisible lead. The exercise of calm, focused breathing slows down Ollie and soon the little pup is happy and settled. By the turn of the last page, your little reader may even know what type of puppy they have in their own head and know just how to care for it in this very necessary book.

Non-fiction, 5–7
Olivia Hope

This sweet book is a delight. Magerl has created a very believable world where an eclectic jumble of discarded toys strive each night to make themselves attractive to customers. Among the toys is a bear called Nop. But nothing makes Nop spangly or dazzling enough. Threadbare, scruffy, missing buttons, without a ribbon or a scarf, it seems he’s destined for a lonely existence. Nop has a choice – to stay and watch others begin their second lives or to try something new for himself. He decides to exert some agency and autonomy.

Magerl’s illustrations are a lovely mixture of watercolours and fine ink line. Using a rich jewel-like palette of blues, greens, browns and golden yellows, she creates beautiful contrasts between dark and bright shades of colour and light. In one double-page spread, the cooperation between the toys, as they help each other to become sale-worthy, is beautifully depicted and will give children lots of opportunities for close looking. Magerl has made Oddmint’s Dumporeum into a place in which we would all love to have a good rummage.

However, the use of language in this book makes it shine out from many other picturebooks. The ‘shelves jostled with anticipation’ in Oddmint’s. The wind ‘harried, gnawed and tugged’ – there are gorgeous, rich, meaty words here to enlarge a child’s vocabulary, even as their imaginations are being fired by the whimsical world of the Dumporeum and the exciting possibilities of a scruffy bear taking control as he seeks to recreate his identity.

Non-fiction, 5–7
Mary Roche

Ecology, green living, clean eating and growing your own food have all become important topics for a variety of reasons, not least of which is climate change. This book might show children that by gardening they can take action and do something very beneficial to help the environment. This could provide them with a sense of agency as an antidote to the regular news stories about the effects of global warming.

The endpapers are bright and attractive, showing a summer garden filled with flowers and a big butterfly taking centre stage. Starting in January, each opening of the book depicts a month in the garden. The interdependence of soil, plants, insects, birds, animals and people is understated but visible. The cyclical nature of the gardener’s year is depicted through the use of very bright contrasting blocks of colour. From dark earth tones in winter and early spring, we progress to light-filled double spreads, showing summer in all its glory of blue skies and riotous reds and pinks. There is a very strong design element and a lot for children to look at and discuss. The text is minimal and factual, whereas the illustrations are busy and energetic.

This book, then, is a timely and welcome addition to homes and classrooms. It might well entice parents, teachers and children to begin gardens of their own. Overall, the message conveyed is that growing plants is hard work, but it provides great joy and satisfaction as well as food to eat.

Non-fiction, 5–7
Mary Roche
Lexie Wilde is under the impression that she’s going to the Happy Hollow Camp for Joyful Boys and Girls for the summer. That is, until her grandmother takes a wrong turn by accident and she finds herself at Camp Croak where a summer of werewolves, zombies and ghosts awaits her.

Dolan’s text is assured and engaging; her language is rich and challenging and offers young readers a chance to broaden their ghoulsh vocabulary. Her illustrations are a macabre joy to the eye with something new and captivating on every page. Lexie Wilde is a charming heroine and the cast of characters that surround her, from her camp counsellors to the wonderfully unique individuals who befriend her, are original and well-drawn – in every sense of the phrase!

Perfect for readers who are fond of the darker and creepier side of school stories, Taylor Dolan’s Ghoul Scouts series will delight and thrill in equal measure. A story that is definitely not just for Halloween! 5–7, 8–10

Becky Long
Shane Hegarty
Illustrated by Ben Mantle
BOOT: THE RUSTY RESCUE
HODDER CHILDREN’S BOOKS, FEBRUARY 2020
PAPERBACK, 240PP, £6.99
ISBN 9781444949391

Since Boot came to live in the abandoned Dr Twitchy’s Emporium of Amusements, he’s had a lot of adventures, made fantastic new friends and learned what real happiness is about; though he still doesn’t really understand humans. And now, a new adventure is afoot! While searching for a new nose for Gerry, Boot and the gang discover a rusty, broken old robot in the back of the testing lab. Soon to be tossed down the chute to ‘Robot Heaven’, Rusty won’t last much longer. Boot has to save him! There’s something unique about Rusty; he has to have a chance at happiness. But will Boot and his friends be able to rescue Rusty and help him find his real robot-self?

Fast, funny and heartfelt, this is a delightful adventure. The perfectly paced action kicks off straight away and keeps rolling as the reader travels along throughout the book. There are daring feats, hilarious foibles and surprising heroics, but at its core, this is a tale of friendship, belonging and what it means to be human, to be just who you are. While the story is told by Boot himself, each character shines individually, bringing variety and perspective to the tale. Boot’s musings add extra emphasis, giving pause for thought and a good laugh as the drama builds. Well-crafted storytelling coupled with wonderfully expressive black-and-white illustrations at the turn of every page create a book that is not only easy to read, but an utter joy. Marvellous to read alone or share! 5–7, 8–10

Mary Esther Judy

Karmelo C. Iribarren
Illustrated by Riya Chowdhury
Translated by Lawrence Schimel
POEMS THE WIND BLEW IN
EMMA PRESS, NOVEMBER 2019
PAPERBACK, 76PP, £8.99
ISBN 9781912915316

Winner of the English PEN award for writers in translation, this thoughtful collection of poems places a spotlight on the ordinary and adds a voice to everyday items. It contains a world familiar to young readers: lampposts and wet streets, clouds and rain, and observations of people and birds caught up in bad weather. Iribarren’s poems, first written in Spanish and translated by Schimel, are short but deep. They contain a viewpoint that a young reader, new to poetry, will understand, but they will also enlighten them on how the inspiration to write beautifully can be found everywhere.

The ‘Bonus Bits’ section at the back of the book, where Iribarren encourages the reader to write a poem about their own immediate world, is especially pleasing. The questions, suggestions and activities are perfectly pitched to ensure young readers can catch moments of inspiration anywhere.

The collection, interspersed with simple illustrations by Chowdhury, is full of bite-sized thoughts that will leave a large mark on any aspiring poet. A must-have for any teacher wanting to make poetry accessible to all. Poetry, 5–7, 8–10

Olivia Hope

Jennifer Berne
Illustrated by Becca Stadtlander
ON THE WINGS OF WORDS: THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF EMILY DICKINSON
CHRONICLE BOOKS, FEBRUARY 2020
HARDBACK, 48PP, £13.99
ISBN 9781452142975

This picturebook life of Emily Dickinson is a beautiful and captivating introduction to one of the English-speaking world’s most highly regarded and best-loved poets. Making use of her poems throughout the text, Berne places them to dramatise Dickinson’s internal life as the story unfolds. Simultaneously, of course, she is introducing the reader to poems that are intriguing, mysterious and memorable. The conversational, empathetic, spare narrative makes subtle use of the long dash – in a delightful visual nod to Dickinson’s unique poetic form.

Becca Stadtlander brings a naïve yet surreal quality to the illustrations – a sophisticated choice of style and content – that marries perfectly with the ‘plain’ aesthetic of Dickinson’s poems and the way of life that she embodied. The poems, where they are used in the text, are printed in their own beautiful ‘handwriting’ script. It is called ‘Becca Wings’ and I assume Stadtlander created it especially for this book – to go with her illustrations which feature butterflies and other insects with wings on virtually every page.

The design, production values and high quality of paper make this a beautiful object. It is also a book where care has been taken to think of the young audience. There are excellent notes from both author and illustrator on their own work and their thoughts on poetry, with separate pages ‘About Emily’s Poetry’ and ‘Discovering the World of Poetry’ – illuminating at any age, but very valuable at home or in the primary classroom. This is narrative non-fiction at its best. Poetry, Non-fiction, 8–10, 10–12

Lucinda Jacob
This very attractive poetry book with a difference from best-selling poet Joseph Coelho opens with his assertion that ‘Poems are made to be performed’.

On each of the beautiful double-page spreads is a poem that Coelho has written especially to illustrate a particular way that poems can be read aloud, each with engaging child-centred notes on how to bring it to life. For example, he starts with tongue-twisters, saying it’s ‘a wonderful way to improve your diction (how clearly you can say words)’. I really like the way he respects his readers by finding ways to use words like ‘diction’, ‘diminuendo’, ‘homophones’ and ‘personification’ throughout the book, in this case with the definition following immediately and entirely naturally in his chatty, conversational tone.

There are poems that cover the joys of rhyme and prediction, speaking quickly, speaking slowly, using surprise, involving the audience, getting in character and much more. As with any collection of poems, some appeal more than others, and as a performance poet who works in schools a lot, Coelho really knows his audience, getting in character and entirely naturally in his chatty, conversational tone.

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Nobody Can Stop Don Carlo

Oliver Scherz
Illustrated by Jesús Gabán Bravo
Translated by Deirdre McMahon

NOBODY CAN STOP DON CARLO
YOUNG DEDALUS, JANUARY 2020
PAPERBACK, 96PP, £7.99
ISBN 9781912868025

Nobody Can Stop Don Carlo is a moving tale that deals with parental separation from a child’s perspective. Carlo, who lives in Germany with his mother, decides to head off to Palermo to bring his beloved and absent papa home. Papa hasn’t been in touch for five months and Carlo’s grief is palpable. Excuses are all he gets from the adults in his life. Carlo adores Papa and puts himself at risk to journey alone via train, ferry and taxi to find him. Throughout his somewhat perilous journey, Carlo holds the memory of his father, describing his hearty laugh and carefree ways. However, Papa’s carefree ways verge on the edge of chaos, unemployment and a general lack of dependability. When he finally tracks Papa down, there are some beautiful moments of joy and love, but they are short-lived as Carlo finds himself abandoned on a hot beach while Papa sorts out some business.

Told from the perspective of Carlo, a sensitive child yearning for his absent father, Scherz’s story is very poignant. The illustration on the book cover by Jesús Gabán Bravo is a little stark, but captures the essence of Carlo’s loneliness. The same image is used at the start of each chapter. There are no perfect endings, but the story is not without hope. It celebrates unconditional love and the heartache that comes with it. It also explores the power of forgiveness and proves that families with difficulties can still enjoy happy times and create enduring positive memories.

8–10, 10–12

June Edwards

Lalani of the Distant Sea

Erin Estrada Kelly
Illustrated by Lian Cho

LALANI OF THE DISTANT SEA
PICCADILLY PRESS, JANUARY 2020
PAPERBACK, 384PP, £6.99
ISBN 9781848129153

Imagine a land where birds do not sing and nothing is known of the world beyond. A place fuelled by fear and superstition. A place where girls and women have little value and life is dictated by a single leader. This is where Lalani has grown up.

Lalani is an ordinary girl who is inspired and enthralled by the island’s stories and legends. She is a good girl, loves her mother and her friends, and always tries to do what is right. However, in trying to do what is right, Lalani makes a fateful choice that has devastating effects on her already troubled island. Feeling responsible and under pressure to right this wrong, she decides what she must do. She needs to leave. She knows she must travel north to the place that the stories tell ‘has many good fortunes’ and ‘all the answers to your questions’. But first she must cross a treacherous sea where many brave men, including her father, have perished. So begins a little girl’s incredible and desperate journey, in which she must find not only the courage and tenacity to face her fears, but also the understanding and insight to survive the menacing and fearful creatures and situations she encounters, and these are not always what they at first appear to be.

A dark, powerful story, dealing with betrayal, fear, violence and death, as well as hope and understanding. A fast-paced but truly inspiring book, beautifully written and constructed. 9–12

Margaret Woods Moore

The Unadoptables

Hana Tooke
Illustrated by Ayesha L. Rubio

THE UNADOPTABLES
PUFFIN BOOKS, MAY 2020
HARDBACK, 400PP, £12.99
ISBN 9780241417461

The Little Tulip Orphanage has three very simple rules when it comes to abandoning babies. And yet, in the autumn of 1886, Matron Elinora Gassbeck receives no less than five infants who have been incorrectly abandoned, left on the steps of the building in anything from a coal bucket to a picnic hamper. These five babies, Lotta, Egg, Fenna, Sem and Milou, become known collectively as the Unadoptables and the only thing they have is each other.

Until the year they turn twelve and an unexpected arrival threatens to tear them apart …

This is a startlingly original début from an extremely promising and exciting new voice in children’s books. Tooke’s style is lyrical and fluent, encompassing some fantastically written and dynamic action scenes and a sense of mystery, intrigue and timelessness that pervades the streets the Unadoptables traverse.

The subtle and beautiful magic of the story, though, lies not in the mystery that weaves its way through Tooke’s plot or the exhilarating action scenes, but in the essential individuality of each of the children and their faith in the fact that this is what belonging together means: knowing and loving each other for who they are. Wonderfully relatable and utterly believable child characters are the driving force of this narrative; each of the five Unadoptables will steal your heart in their own particular ways.

This is a mystery story with a difference, an adventure full of intrigue and emotion that will keep you guessing and caring until the very last page. One can only hope that the teasing epilogue promises more adventures from the Unadoptables. 9–12, 12–14

Becky Long
Michael Rosen grew up with many questions about his Jewish ancestors. They were there before the Second World War, but then they weren’t. His grandfather was Polish, and this story focuses on his grandfather’s brothers, Oscar and Martin. Aiming at children from ten years upwards, it is written in a simple and effective way that won’t traumatise readers. The prolific author and poet felt the need to write this book after meeting a student in a school who denied that the Holocaust happened. He explains how important it was to find out more about his relatives. When the Nazis knew they were losing, they tried to destroy evidence that the millions of people they had killed ever existed. In his family’s case, it was working, because no one knew anything about them and this frustrated me beyond words. It meant the Nazis has succeeded,’ he writes. Thanks to Michael Rosen, we now know that Oscar and Martin existed.

The author draws parallels between the plight of refugees today and the Jewish families fleeing for their safety. ‘I hope this book becomes part of a bigger conversation about the refugee crisis. About how to find fair and decent ways of helping people like my relatives,’ he writes. The story is interspersed with simple, thought-provoking poems. It also includes a useful family tree and a list of recommended books about the Second World War, refugees and displacement. Highly recommended. Non-fiction, 10+

Alison Healy

M.G. Leonard and Sam Sedgman
Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli
THE HIGHLAND FALCON THIEF
MACMILLAN CHILDREN’S BOOKS, JANUARY 2020
PAPERBACK, 256PP, £6.99
ISBN 9781529013061

Probably best known for her innovative Beetleboy series, M.G. Leonard has teamed up with friend and playwright Sam Sedgman to bring us the first in a new mystery series, Adventures on Trains. As the story opens, we’re introduced to our protagonist, Harrison Beck, who, as his mother prepares for the arrival of a new baby, finds himself reluctantly accompanying his uncle on the very last journey of the royal train, the Highland Falcon. Uncle Nat is a travel writer determined to document every last moment of this historic occasion. But this wouldn’t be a mystery without some unexpected events, and sure enough, as the train departs for Scotland a valuable brooch goes missing. As suspicions – and accusations! – mount and the passengers begin to turn on each other, Harrison decides to investigate. But the end of the line and his chance to solve the mystery approach …

Leonard’s trademark humour is here, as well as a heartfelt emphasis on friendship and loyalty. Leonard and Sedgman have written the characters so convincingly they literally leap from the page. Expertly paced, the story zips along at breakneck speed but never at the cost of clues, intrigue and suspense. But what really works is the potential for the reader to interact with the mystery, to perceive and solve clues and work alongside Harrison to figure out who the ultimate culprit is.

A classic mystery story written in an evocative and exciting style that will keep readers engaged until the very last page. 9–12

Becky Long

Lucy Worsley
THE AUSTEN GIRLS
BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING, APRIL 2020
PAPERBACK, 286PP, £17.99
ISBN 9781526605450

Lucy Worsley’s The Austen Girls is a historical novel exploring the life of Jane Austen from the perspective of her young nieces, Anna and Fanny. The determined sense of fun and humour that flows throughout the narrative of this book is sure to encourage giggles from readers, as it did from me. Worsley is a brilliant storyteller and her seamless writing works by blending playful puns such as ‘it could be that spilling the milk might release some of the anger that Anna had been bottling up inside herself’ with the seriousness of some of the topics being addressed. Questions like ‘is marriage the only viable option for girls in society?’ and ‘what does love mean?’ are the focus of the story, and from these, the book begins to explore what it means to be caught in that ‘in-between’ phase of growing up – not quite adult nor child.

I became completely engrossed in learning about the lives of these heroines-in-training as they try to establish their place in society and the personal conflicts and dramas they are faced with along the way, be that attending their first ball in search of a husband, doing their chores or getting caught up in their own mischief. This is a witty and vibrant novel about choosing your own path in life. A truly delightful read and perfect precursor or companion to Austen’s own classics. 9–11, 12–14

Katie Sullivan Smyth
One minute Izzy is an ordinary teenage girl with normal everyday problems, like whether she's going to get a part in the school musical or how to deal with the annoying boys in her class. Then Dad drops a bombshell on the family about a long-held secret struggle – Dad is a trans woman and now wants to live as Danielle.

Jamie is only little and takes it all in his stride. Sixteen-year-old Megan freaks out about what people will think and begs her parents not to say anything to school. Izzy feels she has to be the strong one, going along with assurances from Dee (their new name for Dad) that everything will be OK. But deep down, she is worried sick about this fundamental change in her life is what this change will mean for their family.

Joseph Elliott’s début novel *The Good Hawk* offers a refreshing insight not only into disability, but also into the complicated process of learning how to be yourself. The first of a trilogy set in a landscape inspired by Scotland, this fantasy encompasses warring clans, mysterious plagues and magical creatures. The narrative alternates between the perspectives of heroine Agatha and hero Jamie. Agatha is a Hawk and it is her duty to protect her clan by patrolling the wall. Jamie is an Angler, but his biggest fear is of the sea.

This is a book about belonging and fitting in, no matter who or where you are. Readers are brought along on the protagonists’ terrifying but thrilling quest as they are forced from their home that is under attack. Venturing alone to the unknown islands of Scotia and Norveg, they must make their own decisions and challenge what it means to be yourself. The tension and drama of the journey unfolds, as the pair learn how their differences can work for them rather than against them – despite the judgement of others.

When and how do you stand up for yourself? What if the things you believed your whole life about who you are and where you come from turn out not to be true?

A gripping and compelling read that has left me wanting more. Due to some rather explicit and gory scenes, I would recommend this book for an older audience. 12–14, Young Adult

Joseph Elliott

*Katie Sullivan Smyth*
Kate Hodges
Illustrated by Harriet Lee-Merrion
WARRIORS, WITCHES, WOMEN: MYTHOLOGY’S FIERCEST FEMALES
WHITE LION PUBLISHING, MARCH 2020
HARDBACK, 224PP, £18.99
ISBN 9781783449798

There’s a positive glow of ultra-feminist girl power emanating from Kate Hodges’s engaging compendium of mythology’s fifty fiercest females. Don’t expect a tired selection of traditional Greek and Norse ones, though – in this book we meet a hugely diverse and inclusive range, from an Aboriginal gender-fluid serpent to a Japanese preening mermaid-like water goddess obsessed with money and material things – ‘the ultimate self-queen’. The book is divided into five sections: witches, warriors, bringers of misfortune, elemental spirits and munificent spirits, and readers can dip into the different sections at will – this is not a book to be read in a linear way. The profile of each heroine (or provocateur) follows a clear format of four pages, starting with their provenance, alternative names and a short précis giving basic information. Hodges then delves deeper, giving key behaviours/powers, anecdotes and links to lives of modern-day women, often attempting to redeem a character who has been malignled unfairly through negative stereotypes perpetrated throughout history. However, it is the lush, clean, often pared-back illustrations by Harriet Lee-Merrion that really elevated the book’s content for me. Each character has a full-page portrait depicting key characteristics and talismans associated with her craft; for example, the Greek priestess The Pythia sits in a cauldron holding laurel leaves and a dish of spring water, thick vapours rising around her from the ground. In this state, she tells the future. My personal favourite? Japanese goddess of mirth and revelry, Ame-No-Uzume. This big-hearted party girl’s superpower is sure to make people giggle! Non-fiction, 14+, Young Adult
Susan McKeever

Elen Caldecott
THE SHORT KNIFE
ANDERSEN PRESS, JULY 2020
HARDBACK, 391PP, £12.99
ISBN 9781783449798

The Short Knife by Elen Caldecott follows the misfortune of Mai, her sister Haf and their father after their home is destroyed by Saxon warriors. Mai and Haf, having grown up in isolation on their farm, must learn to live in a world created and ruled by men, and dominated by a power struggle between the Saxons and the native British peoples. Mai defines herself as British, Welsh and of Roman descent. She speaks British and Saxon. Caldecott uses the multitude of languages spoken in Britain in bygone eras to evoke an ancestral link to the multiculturalism of the United Kingdom as it is today. In this text, she stresses the importance of language to British identity through her use of Welsh and Saxon terminology and phrases. At its heart, this book is about the history of Great Britain as a land that is defined by the multitude of peoples and nationalities contained therein, as much as it is defined by the conflict between these groups. Caldecott’s text comes at a time when political tensions in Britain have risen to boiling point as a result of issues such as racial disputes and Brexit. The Short Knife reminds the reader that British identity has never been a singular cultural identity, but rather one that is composed of multiple histories, cultures and traditions, English, Welsh and Scottish being just a few. Young Adult
Joanna Geoghegan

Hannah Capin
FOUL IS FAIR
PENGUIN BOOKS, JANUARY 2020
PAPERBACK, 336PP, £7.99
ISBN 9780241404973

On her sixteenth birthday, beautiful, popular Jade crashes a prep school party and is brutally assaulted by a group of impossibly privileged boys who think they have the power to hurt her without consequence. Jade has other ideas. With the fierce support of her friends, she sets out on a mission of bloody revenge, enrolling at the boys’ school, infiltrating their social circle and convincing a trusted teammate to murder them. A retelling of Macbeth, with Jade as Lady Macbeth and her loyal friends as the Weird Sisters. Jade’s lyrical language and unapologetic narration won’t be for everyone, but these bold choices make for an intriguing read. Capin isn’t playing for sympathy or permission. Jade’s crew have always been ‘mean girls’ who take pride in their ability to hurt others, and Jade delights in putting her talents for manipulation to work for a worthy cause. This book reminds me a lot of Thirteen Reasons Why. It has a dark, provocative hook and is driven by an issue that is all too real for many young people (suicidality in Thirteen Reasons, sexual assault here). Both books are more interested in dramatising and validating the pain that the issue can generate than they are in realism or coping mechanisms. Capin is much more self-aware about the wish-fulfilment her story offers, however, and her heightened tone means that Foul can be enjoyed as an entertaining, campy, occasionally cathartic thriller. Young Adult
Rachel Sneyd
Luka Kane is sentenced to die in the Loop, a torturous prison in a world governed by the technologically enhanced rich. This future society depends on an AI that issues harsh punishments to anyone who steps out of line. Luka can only postpone his execution by submitting to experimental and potentially dangerous ‘delays’, and escape is made impossible for all the young inmates by bombs that are surgically threaded through their hearts.

Life is monotonous and painful, and death is inevitable for everyone isolated in the Loop, until signs of disturbances in the outside world begin to intrude. This could be an opportunity for the prisoners, but what will they be escaping into? And this is when things get even more interesting!

This exciting YA novel has it all – action, strange viruses, political and social commentary, romance and mystery. (All set in a post-apocalyptic landscape, of course.)

In this collection of personal essays, poems, self-help guides and visual art, a diverse array of contributors proudly reclaim the word ‘fat’. Some chart their difficult journeys to not just accepting but loving their bodies, while others offer solidarity and practical advice to teens who are experiencing a similar struggle, ranging from dating advice to fashion tips. Many critique the stereotypes and social shaming that fat people face, arguing that fatness is an inherently politicised identity and linking it to their experiences of race, sex and gender.

Personal essays are one of the most challenging and under-appreciated forms of writing for young readers. There are some lovely, accessible pieces here, particularly ‘Chubby City Indian’ and ‘For the Love of Ursula’s Revenge Body’. The poem ‘Seven Things I Would Tell Eleven-Year-Old Me’ is another standout, both considered and defiant. The art piece ‘Fat Prom’ is beautiful and playful, while Tegtmeier’s regularly placed, boldly coloured, graphic illustrations create a sense of continuity between the entries.

Young readers may find it difficult to parse the political framing in some pieces, particularly if they aren’t familiar with online discourse around this topic. There are some international contributors to the collection but the overall vibe is decidedly American, and the framing is explicitly intersectionalist. For readers whom this appeals to, there is much here to absorb and enjoy. Non-fiction, Young Adult

Non-fiction, Young Adult

Rachel Sneyd

The review is positive and recommends the book as a worthy read for fans of dystopian fiction.
Laura Ashcroft-Jones is a desk editor working at a publisher in Dublin.

Marc Diamond is an art director who has been making kids’ educational games for over twenty years and is currently working on writing/illustrating his own books.

June Edwards teaches English and literacy in Mountjoy Prison Education Unit. She has an MA in children’s literature.

By day, Antoinette Fennell researches everything (from Accessible design to Zoology). By night, when not reading to her children, she’s writing and illustrating.

Brenda Frawley alphabetised her books as a child. No one was surprised when she grew up to be a librarian.

Joanna Geoghegan is currently doing an internship with Marsh’s Library and is working towards finishing her first novel.

Alison Healy is the author of How Billy Brown Saved the Queen (published by Little Island Books).

Olivia Hope is a children’s writer working in the Arts Council’s Creative Schools programme. Her début picturebook, Be Wild, Little One, will be published by Bloomsbury Publishing in 2021.

Lucinda Jacob’s poetry book Hopscotch in the Sky and ebook Hopscotch in the Sky Poetry Kit (Little Island Books/Poetry Ireland) are also an audiobook with the poems read by Jennifer Johnston.

Mary Esther Judy always has a children’s book with her. She is a kidlit expert, reviewer and blogger (Fallen Star Stories), an editor and a bookseller.

Becky Long has a PhD in children’s literature from Trinity College Dublin and works as a programme coordinator for TCD’s Access Programme.

Natasha Mac a’ Bháird is an author and editor. Her latest books are Laura’s Spooky Show in the Star Club series and Reindeer Down!

Is léachtóir é Liam Mac Peaircín i Roinn na Gaeilge, Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál, Luimneach.

Susan McKeever is an editor and writer based in Portobello, Dublin, whose love of children’s books started when she began editing Eyewitness Guides for Dorling Kindersley many moons ago.

Is mac léinn in Institiúid Oideachais Marino i Amy Ni Chléirigh agus tá sí ag déanamh staidéir ar an gcúrsa nua bunmhúinteoireachta trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Is Ollamh Comhlach le Gaeilge í Ríona Nic Congáill sa Choláiste Ollscoile, Baile Atha Cliath.

Elizabeth O’Brien is an educator, writer and PhD student who appreciates reading as a space to pause, think and know others through poetry and story.

Brigid O’Dea is sensitive. This informs her writing as a journalist, critic and poet.

Lindsay Quayle supports the Early Years programme at Scottish Book Trust. She eats, sleeps and breathes children’s books.

Mary Roche is an education consultant, bookworm and author of Developing Children’s Critical Thinking through Picturebooks. She can usually be found where the books are.

Andrew Roycroft is a published poet, a constant reader and an avid reviewer of books of all types and age ranges.

Rachel Sneyd is a writer and reviewer whose work has appeared in the Stinging Fly and the Incubator.

Paul Staunton is a primary school teacher with a love of illustration and reading.

Katie Sullivan Smyth is an MPhil in children’s literature student in Trinity College Dublin and a Cairde Club leader with Dyspraxia Association Ireland.

Originally from New Zealand, MaryBrigid Turner is the resident children’s bookworm at Hodges Figgis. When not reading or selling books, she likes crocheting.

Grace Wells is an award-winning poet and children’s author. She has two grown-up children and lives in Ennistymon, County Clare.

Jan Winter currently lives in London where she works as a teacher of English and in literacy support.

Margaret Woods Moore is a former teacher currently pursuing her own practice as an artist and illustrator/author.
Children’s Books Ireland is the national children’s books organisation of Ireland. Our mission is to make books a part of every child’s life. We champion and celebrate the importance of authors and illustrators and we work in partnership with the people and organisations who enhance children’s lives through books. Our vision is an Ireland in which books are a part of every child’s life and where meaningful engagement with books is supported by passionate and informed adults in families, schools, libraries and communities all across the country.

Children’s Books Ireland is a registered charity and becoming a member supports the work we do.

What do we do?
We publish Inis magazine online and in print to provide a focus for children’s books discussion and review.

We run the KPMG Children’s Books Ireland Awards, along with the Shadowing Scheme for schools and groups of young readers, to recognise excellence in the work of Irish authors and illustrators.

We run an annual conference featuring some of the most exciting speakers in writing, illustration, publishing, reading promotion and critical discussion of books for children and young adults.

We coordinate an annual celebration of reading throughout the month of October. We strive for live literature events to be made available for children in every county on the island of Ireland. We commission an original illustration each year to showcase an Irish illustrator for use on bookmarks, posters and the Inis Reading Guide – a guide to the best books published in any given year, especially highlighting Irish-published books and books by Irish authors and illustrators.

We provide professional development for authors, illustrators and storytellers.

We partner with a wide variety of festivals, venues, libraries and organisations throughout the year to bring authors and illustrators together with young audiences, and we bring young readers together with great books through our Book Clinics.

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