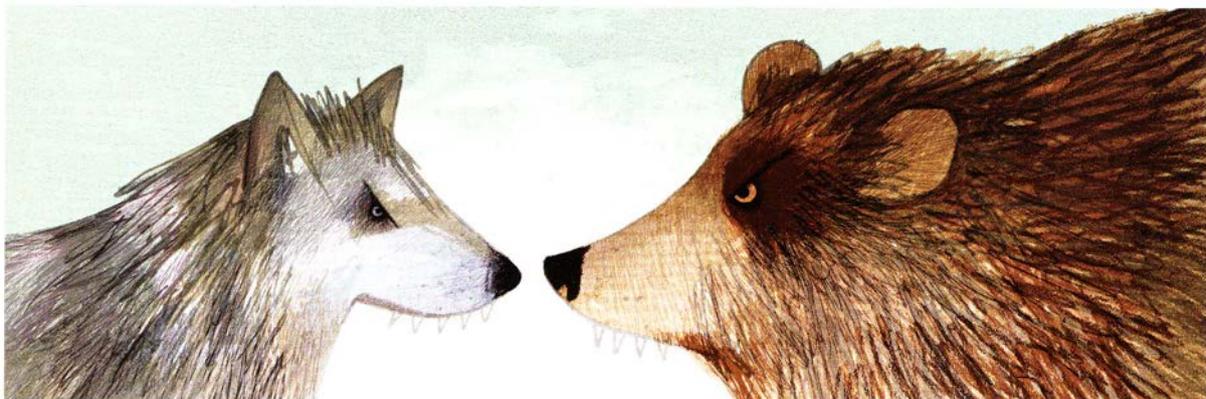


Powerful Imagination: Impact of the Image

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From 'The Berserker's Baby' p.19. Illustration credited to Cate James, *The Dragon's Hoard*, Frances Lincoln Children's Books 2016. Reproduced with permission.

EDITORIAL

Marvellous Imaginations: Extending Thinking Through Picture Books

We can now look back at the IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference that took place in November. It was, as always, a day packed with interest, taking as its theme the importance and power of the visual image in conveying messages and inspiring empathy. Readers will be able to find out more about the presentations on the website, and read the 'drawn notes' of Emma Dunmore and Laura Davis, two MA graduates who attended conference at www.ibby.org.uk/conferences.php.

Our issue of *IBBYLink* continues with the theme as Anna McQuinn explores with us what she wanted to achieve in publishing *What Are You Playing At?*, a picture book aimed at the youngest readers, which uses the illustrations to challenge received opinions and beliefs in both the children and the adults.

For many of us, the term 'picture book' will probably conjure up something where the text and the pictures will mirror each other – or, as in the best picture books, extend or even comment on each other. The reader is the audience.

However there are picture books where the reader is very much invited into the illustrations, which will be full of life and busyness. This is a genre that has its own name – they are *wimmelbücher*,

wimmelbooks. Elys Dolan, herself an illustrator, introduces us to this particular form when she describes the research she has been conducting into these books and how they achieve their effects.

If wimmelbooks come to us from across the Channel, Raymond Briggs is a very well-known name here. June Swain reflects on his book *The Bear*, reminding us why his work tells powerful and engaging stories.

And story, storytelling, is indeed powerful, no more so than when combined with visual images. It creates a valuable means to engage young readers, bridging divides, and opening young minds to other lives and other possibilities, allowing them to empathise. No one would argue with this. However, as Helen Limon's thought-provoking article suggests, this might not be the whole story.

Then another aspect is highlighted in the work done by Jane Ray for The Nightingale Project, which is on display at the South Kensington and Chelsea Mental Health Centre.

Marvellous – and perilous – imaginations, indeed.

Ferelith Hordon

Empathy: A Monstrous Call?

PICTURE BOOKS

Helen Limon

'I think I've worked you out, O'Malley,' Harry finally said.

'I think I know what it is you're asking for.'

(Patrick Ness, *A Monster Calls*.)

This week I went to the film adaptation of the novel *A Monster Calls*. Commissioned from an idea by another Carnegie Medal winning author Siobhan Dowd, Patrick Ness made something very wonderful with his celebrated book about the power of stories, the limits of stories, and the need for truth telling in fiction and in real life. Despite being familiar with the book, and despite its flaws as an adaptation, like evidently many in the audience in the cinema that day, I wept my way through the second half, glad of the dark. I knew quite well what was to come and yet, still, I was overcome with emotion. Such is the power of good storytelling that digitally delivered strangers (actors pretending to feel things, using words made up by another) were affecting me, and others, beyond reason.

Empathy is described as the capacity to both understand a person as though from their point of view (cognitive) and to experience their feelings as though they were our own (emotional). It is also referred to as the capacity to both see life through another's eyes and to walk in someone else's shoes. Using the devices of cinema, *A Monster Calls* had tricked me into an experience of emotional and cognitive disclosure: I felt bonded with the hopeful mother and with the distressed child, and with the apparently unfeeling grandmother and the regretful father. Having, myself, both loved well and failed at loving, and lost well and failed at living well with loss, I felt their displays of grief very keenly. And, as a result of both cognitively understanding the reasons for Connor's distress, and feeling his emotional pain 'as though it were my own', I got the full, niceness-inducing, hormonally supported, bonding hit that can, or so the argument goes, make the world a better place by dissolving the boundaries between people.

In terms of affect, it matters little that Connor is not a real person with whom there are no dissolvable boundaries. Connor is made up. He is a character in fiction. But Connor's existence as a person of the imagination is no barrier to creating empathy. Indeed, as the conceit of the monster's confounding stories-within-a-story illustrates, despite the complexity of good fiction, stories that confirm our cultural expectations of justice and retribution can be much easier to empathise with than the messy ambiguity of real life. Reading classic fiction is reported to make us nicer by increasing our empathy.¹ Adverts, most notably the Christmas heavyweights that now make mainstream news and are watched on-demand through a variety of channels, have peddled in empathy and the enhanced 'disgust' response fed by oxytocin (the bonding hormone), from the get go. Given the viewing figures for this empathy-inducing material we should, by all accounts, be swimming in oxytocin and bonded to pretty much everyone. And yet, somehow that doesn't seem to be how it works. I think *A Monster Calls* may hold some of the reasons why, and why empathy is actually a rather problematic attribute and a flawed driver for inclusive and generous socio-political change.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/oct/08/literary-fiction-improves-empathy-study>

The idea that empathy is a central concern of the arts is embedded in Arts Council England's recent publication on the value of arts and culture to people and society.² The value proposition rests on the idea that the arts allow for sustained contemplation of self and others, and that this sustained consideration of what it is to be human can be the driver for transformational personal and collective change. This is an ambition worthy of public funding, but what if those who are portrayed in art and culture only represent a small cross-section of the human experience? What if only *some* lives and experiences are offered up for empathetic bonding? Work by Frans de Waal, with animals, on emotional contagion, that lies behind much of the science of empathy and related theories of mind should alert us to the dangers inherent in the extreme bias of empathy: the resultant bonding is highly selective.³ For there to be those with whom we bond there must be those who fall outside. There must be otherness. Empathy, and its powerful but narrow focus on those we are drawn to bond with, supports feelings of community. But this has a dark side: Waal cautions that strong community feeling can exclude those we decide are other and can quickly become expressed as negative prejudice, tribalism and racism.

It would be very hard to argue that either historical or contemporary fiction illuminates the full range of humans or the full range of human experience. Children's literature, for example, has been criticised, perhaps more than most, for a narrow focus on white, western characters and their troubles.⁴ This is understood to be, in part, an outcome of selective publishing and that, based on factors such as colour, class, culture, sexuality, physical capacity and language, many voices are (still) unheard. The lack of diversity in children's books, for example, means that the opportunities to see life through another's eyes and walk in someone else's shoes is necessarily limited by the range of eyes and shoes on offer. While the writer is not expected to write only from their own direct experience and there is an enduring conceit that the writer has a special way of listening to the world that enables them to escape the trap of their own frame, this is contested. Marina Warner in conversation at Newcastle University in 2016 was pragmatic about the limits of the power of fiction, arguing that the writer, and therefore the story, cannot escape their own frame. Despite our best intentions, we don't know what we don't know.

There are examples of fiction delivering significant changes in the real world. A recent storyline about coercive control in the BBC radio programme *The Archers*, generated thousands of pounds in donations to a number of domestic abuse charities. But it is important to acknowledge that this may have happened because the donors not only felt emotional empathy for the character but because the programme makers made clear that the fictional story was based on a real-life case. Listeners were able to invest both emotionally and cognitively in this story because, having interrogated it for 'facts' – and *The Archers'* audience give this a very spirited interrogation – they found it to be authentic.⁵

Perhaps, as Jane Davis, director of the Reader Organisation, argued on BBC Radio 4's One to One series on empathy with ex-Arts Council director Peter Bazelgette, the best

² <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/exploring-value-arts-and-culture/value-arts-and-culture-people-and-society>

³ http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_evolution_of_empathy/

⁴ <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/childrens-books-are-too-white-says-laureate-9602505.html>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/mar/31/fans-of-the-archers-raise-more-than-80000-for-domestic-abuse-charity>

that fiction can do is to bring our own feelings to our attention and so help us to understand that we are complex in our responses but able to manage our feelings around ambivalence. Davis offers the idea that the empathy generated by fiction that is of most value, may be our empathy for ourselves.⁶

Alongside its selectiveness, empathy has another counter for the better-world argument: being very empathetic does not, of itself, mean that you are very nice. To illustrate this, I return to the quote from *A Monster Calls* that heads this article. For anyone not familiar with the story, Harry is a schoolyard bully who is targeting the central character, Connor. Connor's mother is dying but he is insisting to anyone who asks that he is fine. Harry knows this is not true and is using an extraordinary amount of his time and thinking to working Connor out. Harry is not nice. But Harry is very empathetic. Like sadists everywhere, he is trying to understand exactly how Connor is thinking and feeling in order to make his torture of the boy more effective. I suggest that Harry is, aside from the otherworldly monster, the most effectively empathetic character in the story. Harry gives Connor the sort of deep reflective contemplation that allows him to say with confidence and, as we come to realise, accuracy, 'I think I've worked you out, O'Malley'. Indeed, Harry's subsequent strategy of no longer seeing Connor, is the trigger for Connor to unleash a sustained and violent attack on Harry, leaving him in hospital. The difference in empathetic capacity between the child Harry and the concerned adults surrounding Connor is illuminated by the head teacher's refusal to punish Connor for his violent outburst. The sadistic Harry has seen what Connor believes he needs and the sympathetic adult has not. Sadism, like state-sponsored torture, is not confined to fiction.

In his provocative book *Against Empathy*, Paul Bloom argues that empathetic arousal is not the only force for kindness and that because of its narrowness and bias, and its insensitivity to numerical difference, empathy is a flawed basis for making decisions and a poor guide to social policy. He argues that certain activities must override empathy. For example, in order to be effective, medicine and the criminal justice system must 'draw on a reasoned, even counter-empathetic, analysis of moral obligation and likely consequences.'⁷

Bloom posits that 'empathy is always perched precariously between gift and invasion', and there is evidence for the warping impact of this dynamic in the competitive 'enterprise' funding of social care in the third sector. I have worked with organisations that are concerned with urgent need. Some of these organisations are focused on displaced people, such as migrants, and some on military veterans – themselves also conceptually displaced. These are people in pain and in great need. I find it distressing in the extreme to see these groups and their life stories pitted against each other for the provision of care. Even when resources are short, it is still unacceptable that the beauty-pageant approach demands a tally of empathy hits as currency. For me, and others working with the third sector, this is an example of relying on empathy to inform personal and collective decision making and social policy, and it is not good enough.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was published in a picture-book form by my publisher, Frances Lincoln, in association with Amnesty International. It is a lovely book and I am proud to have been awarded it as part of my prize for the Diverse Voices Children's Book Award.

⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b085pxy1>

⁷ <http://bostonreview.net/forum/paul-bloom-against-empathy>

The text reads: 'We are all born free and equal. We all have our own thoughts and ideas. We should all be treated in the same way. These rights belong to everybody, whatever our differences.' As the text of the declaration makes very clear, these are *rights*. There is no requirement for these rights to be earned by engendering the requisite empathy to belong to, and be bonded with, groups with power. The declaration is unambiguous: society should be compassionate, just and fair because these are human *rights* and *obligations*, not because we feel warm and fuzzy and bonded. While acknowledging that empathy plays an important role in shaping responses, Bloom concludes that 'being a good person is more likely to be related to distanced feelings of compassion and kindness, along with intelligence, self-control, and a sense of justice'.

And this brings me back to the versions of *A Monster Calls* and what they reveal about acceptable, relatable narratives – those that might more easily generate empathy – and, as a result, revealing what I consider to be its flaws as an adaptation. In the book, the monster has power beyond the boy's imagination: it leaves traces of itself in the world, such as leaves and berries, that Connor must tidy up and hide. The book monster is personal to Connor, but it is real. It has compassion for Connor and great power but it does not cure Connor's mother. The monster is 'set walking' to help Connor cope after his mother dies. The stories the monster tells are (it says) about life not being how you may think it should be or would like it to be. I suggest that the film tells a different story. Marketed to a family audience, it tells of an imaginative child provided with all the material – drawings, stories, wise grandfather and creative capacity – to imagine a monster. So the film monster who helps Connor is not coming to bring knowledge from outside the boy's existing experience. The monster is Connor. Through his mother's sketchbooks we see that in-extremis, Connor calls forth a version of what he already knows, including all the difficult stories-within-stories. This is, I suggest, reassuring for an adult audience who do not believe in magic or real monsters. It is reassuring because it tells a story that yes life is unfair and sad and unkind but actually it is just as it should be: the child, surrounded by thoughtful, supportive adults should and will be able to recover from great grief by accessing their own creative capacities and the embedded gifts of distributed good (enough) parenting. This is a story congruent with psychoanalytic theory. The story it tells is familiar and it is not disturbing. We can empathise with Connor and weep in safety because he is not really disrupting an adult sense of how things (probably) are and how they (probably) should be. Connor is looked after well enough and will be alright in the end, and he didn't need any real magic to do it. This is the problem with asking empathy to do too much of the heavy lifting in the world. Empathy is a great and wonderful tool but like all tools its role is limited. Empathy is constrained by our capacity to hear the people and their stories that really disturb us and so it is constrained in the nature and variety of the problems we want, and need, to address.

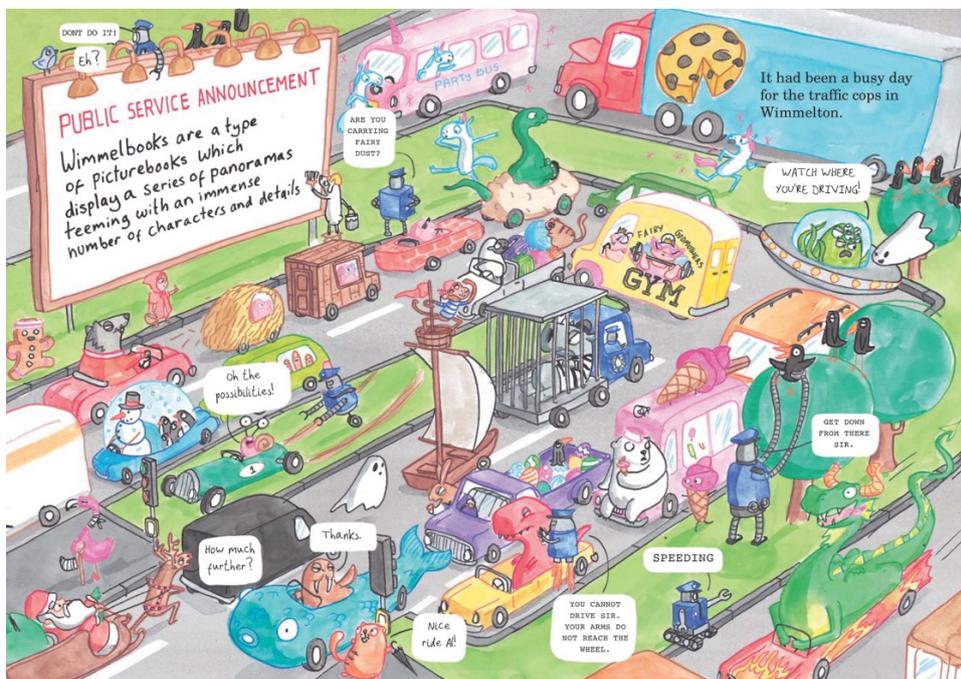
[Helen Limon is a writer, teacher and researcher at Newcastle University. Her research is concerned with the transformative capacities of life-stories and the politics of service design. She currently works with those experiencing (forced) displacement such as women military veterans and migrants. She recently joined the IBBY Italy camp on the island of Lampedusa and used the Silent Book Collection located at the library. Her first novel for children, *Om Shanti Babe*, won the 2011 Frances Lincoln Diverse Voices Award. Helen is currently working on her second book, *Start a Hare*, with the illustrator Anne Wilson.]

Stories in Detail: Wimmelbooks and Narrative

Elys Dolan

When writing and illustrating picture books I've always found the devil is in the detail. I can't help but surround the central narrative with extra characters, detailed settings and subplots to create intricate worlds. To do this I naturally gravitated towards creating highly detailed imagery. This wouldn't surprise anyone who knew how I'd spent my early years obsessing over Martin Handford's *Where's Wally?* and Richard Scarry books.

Later, as a fully fledged adult doing a PhD in picture books and still obsessing over *Where's Wally?* (one day I will find him!), I discovered these detailed books have a name, wimmelbooks. Although not much has been written on the subject of wimmelbooks we are fortunate to have one main researcher, Cornelia Rémi (2011), who has explored the subject. She defines wimmelbooks as 'a type of wordless picture book which displays a series of panoramas teeming with an immense number of characters and details'. This is a definition I'd broadly agree with but I'd suggest a slight amendment. In the course of my research I've found that when talking about visual concepts sometimes it's more effective to show rather than describe so I've created a visual definition to show you what I believe a wimmel image is.



Here I've removed 'wordless' from the definition so it reads, 'Wimmelbooks are a type of picture book which displays a series of panoramas teeming with an immense number of characters and details'. Rémi's definition fits neatly around the German tradition of wimmelbooks, including the brilliant work of Rotraut Susanne Berner, where these detailed books are often wordless, but this change allows for what Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) describe as 'the unique characteristic of picture books as an art form', the combination of two levels of communication, the visual and the verbal. It expands the scope and versatility of wimmelbooks and, more importantly, it encompasses a shared factor that unites many such detailed books and describes my own motivation to use wimmel imagery. That factor is the 'wimmel' itself. Let me elaborate.

The word 'wimmelbook' comes from the German word 'wimmelbuch' (Cuperman, 2014). The Collins German Dictionary (2005) says 'Wimmeln' translates as 'to teem'

and 'buch' as 'book'. It is this teeming nature, the 'immense amount of characters and details' (Rémi, 2011), that I believe is the key feature of these books.

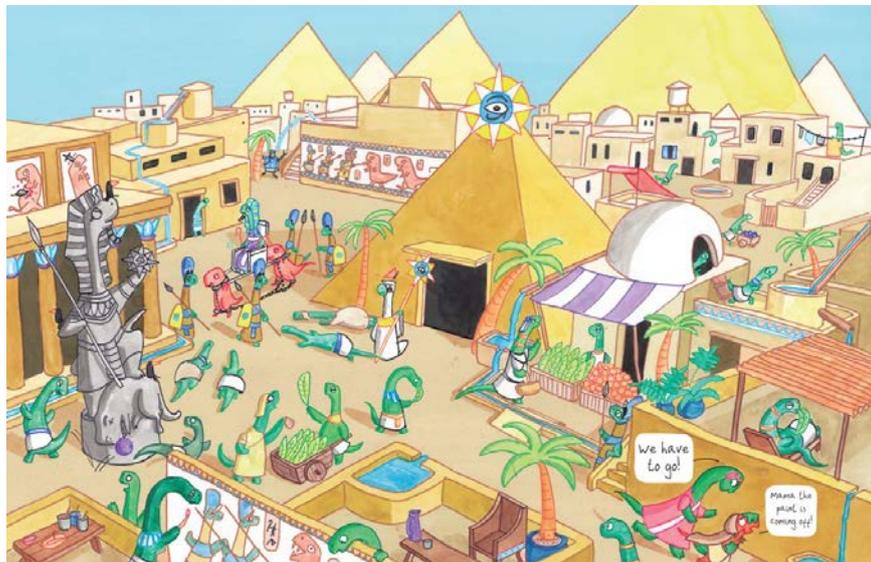
Having a huge number of characters doing a variety of things in an expansive and detailed setting can convey a substantial range of information to the reader on a single page. Much more so than through the imagery traditionally associated with picture books. Through this high level of detail a wimmelbook can offer depth of understanding of a fictional world and so the characters and the narratives occurring within it. It's this effect that makes using wimmel imagery a unique way of working. I'm going to refer to imagery that involves this teeming detail and exhibits the effects described above as having wimmelbook characteristics.

Now onto the bit I really enjoy, what you can do with these wimmelbook characteristics.

For instance, you can add purpose to the reader's exploration of the detail by giving them an objective, creating a game or puzzle. This is seen in *Where's Wally* by Martin Handford (1987) and *Pablo and Jane* by José Domingo (2015). Alternatively, being able to show in detail how complex structures interconnect using wimmel images can be incredibly useful for non-fiction. This is seen in *What Do People Do All Day?* by Richard Scarry (1968) and *Castle Cross-Section* by Stephen Biesty (1996).

The thing I want to demonstrate in more depth though is how wimmelbook characteristics can be used in visual storytelling. I believe their greatest strength within a narrative picture book is their utility in creating intricate, immersive and fully formed worlds. To demonstrate this we need to take a trip to a strange and foreign land

Explore the details of the particular world below. Pay close attention, there will be a quiz later.



From looking at the wimmel image above can you tell me ...

- Who or what lives in this city?
- What are their houses like?
- What do they eat?
- What do they worship?
- Who's in charge?
- Are there any conflicts?
- Do they play any games?

If you can answer at least some of those questions then this demonstrates how you can use wimmel imagery to create an expansive and fully formed setting in a single image. This is also seen in Marc Boutavant's *Around the World with Mouk* (2009) where he uses wimmel images of particular countries to convey a wide range of details and facts about that place. Cléa Dieudonné's *Megalopolis* (2016) uses one huge wimmel image to depict the workings of an entire city and an alien's journey through it.

For me such a detailed setting begs to have a story woven around it because it makes the narrative more immersive and convincing whilst adding depth and understanding to the characters and situations. Nikolajeva and Scott (2010) say the setting can 'convey narrative time, for instance, by a change of seasons, enhance characterisation, suggest a mood, or add detail not mentioned in the text'. In this particular case I've used the setting to set up the mood and characterisation for these characters.



Did you notice them?

I placed them in the bottom right-hand corner of the previous image to draw attention to them and trigger the narrative. To tell their story using just wimmel images though could be limiting. In the images below my colleague Snail will talk through a way of managing this



THE MIXED METHODS APPROACH

A way of incorporating wimmel images into visual narratives.



Sometimes in a picturebook you need to vary the pacing.

Salisbury (2004) defines pacing as the rate at which the story unfolds and can be controlled by 'changing the viewpoint, varying the size of images and altering the actual design of the image on the page.'



So if you need a period of intense action you can intersperse wimmel images with vignettes or comic style panels...



...which creates a sense of fast moving action and builds tension.

Don't let that Rex escape.



But if a big dramatic moment, a turning point in the narrative or a pause is required then you can include a much emptier double page spread because 'it focuses our attention to the action of the figure rather than their relationship to their setting' (Nodelman 1990)

So if you intermingle wimmel images with other methods of visual storytelling they can enhance a narrative whilst not losing the storytelling ability of the wimmel images. That's not to say you have to do this. In *The Bear's Song* (2013), Benjamin Chaud artfully conveys a linear narrative, exclusively using wimmel images.

Another advantage of wimmel imagery is that it allows the maker to include subplots and asides that exist independently of any central narrative amongst the detail. The reader can then spot these as they follow the story. I can't demonstrate one of these subplots visually in this context, but you can find a great example in Matty Long's *Super Happy Magic Forest* (2015). Here the reader can follow the alternate adventure of Dennis the butterfly alongside the central narrative.

One of the advantages of subplots is that they enhance repeat readings. The reader can revisit the story and find something new that either adds to the central narrative or augments the world in which it's set.

The biggest challenge of using wimmel images narratively is arguably composition. It can be difficult to distinguish particular elements and lead the reader across the image in a specific manner. There are visual ways around this though.

Scale: Increase the volume of space taken up by the focal object to draw attention to it through the teeming detail.



Colour: Make the focal object a contrasting colour to distinguish it.



Space: Using the way in which the detail is composed to create negative space around the object.



In this article I've endeavoured to show ways in which a maker can utilise wimmel images to tell a story with a central narrative. It is the detailed, teeming nature of the wimmel images that allows them to convey a large amount of information and so enhance setting, mood and characterisation, whilst allowing additional subplots and inviting repeat readings. Wimmel imagery is being used by a wide range of picture-book makers to great effect for purposes ranging from narrative to non-fiction and puzzle books, so demonstrating its versatility.

On a personal level I can't help but keep trying to improve the way I use wimmel imagery to create richer stories. From my first picture book *Weasels*, which depicts the secret base teeming with villainous weasels bent on world domination, to my latest

offering *Mr Bunny's Chocolate Factory*, which shows the intricate workings of the Easter Bunny's chocolate-egg factory, I'm doing my best to harness teeming detail to give my readers new and fascinating worlds to explore.

[This article has been adapted from Elys Dolan's pictorial essay 'How Wimmelbooks Work: A Snail's Guide'.]

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[Elys Dolan is an author and illustrator living and working in Cambridge, UK. Her recent books include *Steven Seagull Action Hero*, *The Doughnut of Doom* and the forthcoming *Mr Bunny's Chocolate Factory*. Along with this she is studying for her PhD in humour in picture books at the Cambridge School of Art and lectures on the MA in Children's Book Illustration there. In her spare time Elys enjoys growing cacti, making fudge and having a quiet lie down.]

What Are You Playing At?

Anna McQuinn

On a French stand at the Bologna Bookfair in 2012, I came across one of the most interesting books I'd ever seen. I've worked in children's publishing since 1989, so that's saying something! It took me a while to work out what was going on – my French is very rusty and was never brilliant in the first place, but I began to follow the structure and was blown away On the opening page there's a photo of two young girls dancing and on the page opposite the words 'Les Garçons ça fait pas de la Danse'. However, when you open the flap, inside you see two young men dancing with the comment, 'ce serait trop ridicule!'. One might have expected some sort of resolution, but the next page was back to a young girl again, this time with the text declaring: 'Les Garçons ça joue pas a la Dinette'.

Throughout the fair I kept returning to the book, and, when I got a moment, I managed to chat with the publisher and ask for a reading copy. The rest, as they say, is history – though the project was extremely challenging as we worked to retain the essence of the French original, while wrestling with how best to translate it for a UK audience.

Anyone who is familiar with the Alanna Books list knows that we don't do 'issue books' in an overt way – though we deal with complex issues in our books. So for me this was a perfect fit. It robustly interrogates the idea that children should play in different ways according to their gender and does so without becoming in any way didactic. Many who would attempt to tackle such a topic would do so through the medium of a story – perhaps focusing on a young girl or boy who is told s/he is not allowed to play in a certain way because s/he is a girl/boy. The story would likely follow the child as they challenge the concept and, in the end, perhaps show her/him playing as they wish. Here, in comparison, the book seems to offer no such reassuring resolution. The text that accompanies the child image each time (which I will call the 'child-image text'), robustly states that boys/girls do not X – as if it were a fact. There is no watering down or distancing - no 'some people think ...' or other such panacea.

When you open the flap, the text accompanying the 'adult' image is equally challenging – seeming to underline or even amplify the child-image statement. It adds things like, 'That would be silly' or 'real men/women don't ...' However, when you look at the photo, the adult man/woman is doing exactly that thing that the text proscribes. So where does this leave the reader? And where does the meaning lie?

The book opens with two girls dancing accompanied by the text, 'boys don't dance'.



When you open the full-page fold out, the text underneath continues, 'that would be ridiculous!'

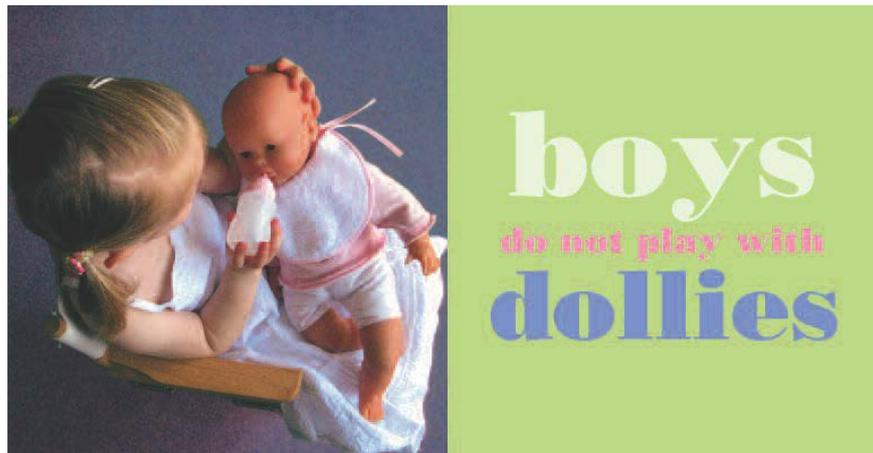


But the photo image is of a young man in a dance studio pirouetting in front of a mirror. It's a complex image – though he appears to be doing a pirouette, he is not wearing ballet costume. It looks like he's doing modern dance and he's wearing jeans and a hoodie, but the hoodie is pink.

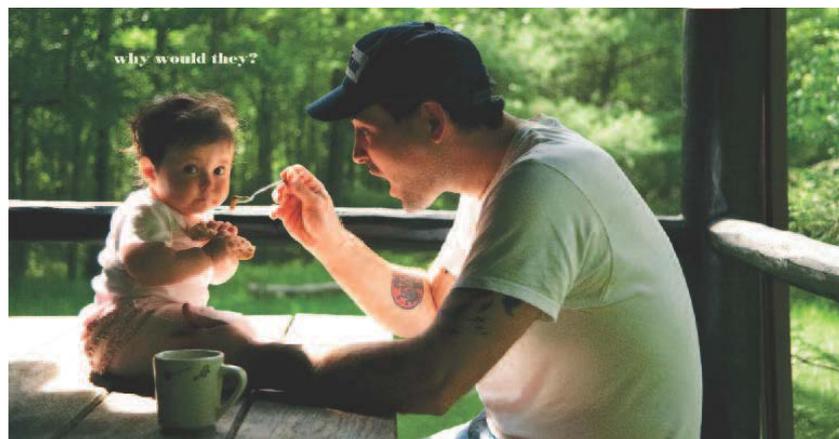
On the next spread, a little girl is playing with her tea set in her play kitchen. The text says, 'Boys don't play kitchens'.

Under the flap, the text continues, 'that would be silly, wouldn't it?' – a rhetorical question, but the 'wouldn't it?' is the first note of doubt we encounter.

The adult image is of a male chef focused on finishing what looks like a complex dessert.



The third spread shows a little girl playing at feeding her dolly with a toy bottle of milk. The text reads, 'boys don't play with dollies'. The text inside continues with, 'why would they?' and the image shows a father feeding his young child.



This is the first time that the adult text is not quite so assured, and any reader who was unsure as to the relationship between text and images would be alerted at this stage. This adult image is also the strongest illustration of how important play is for young children. How they use play to reflect what they see around them, to make sense of it, to rehearse different roles, to imagine future selves The image of the Dad feeding his little daughter eloquently answers the question posed by the text, 'why would they?', and the answer is not the one implied by the seemingly rhetorical question!

From here on, the reader anticipates a rebuttal to be revealed in the adult images under the flaps – rebuttals to the assertions that boys do not skip, and boys don't show their feelings.

At this point the book switches to considering girls – and there is a similar progression from child text 'girls do not play football' continuing inside to 'they really don't like all that sweaty stuff!' through 'girls do not play with cars' – 'proper girls are just not interested in driving', 'girls do not build stuff' and 'girls do not fly planes', this last accompanied by an image of a young girl in a rocket. And once again, the adult text, while seeming certain, is wholly undermined by the image.

This repeated juxtaposition of the text and images is creating a whole new meaning that resides in the contradiction between what the text says and what the image shows. In fact, as the reader goes through the book, s/he may realise that, in fact, rather than illustrating the text, the photos undermine it completely.

As I read the book at first and this realisation dawned on me, I was just blown away. It was just so clever! Instead of attempting to engage with or have any discussion about the stereotypical statements via narrative or challenging text, the adult photos simply show the statements to be untrue – blatantly so. This then prompts the reader to reach her/his own conclusion – that the stereotypes proposed by the text (regardless of how authoritatively presented) are simply not what happen in real life. For me, repeated readings led me to think of the text as the voice of societal censure. The voice that children hear in playgroups, in the park and even in their own homes – 'Boys don't play with dollies', 'Boys don't dress up in tutus', 'Girls must look pretty, not get hot and sweaty playing games' The photos don't just challenge these views, they show the opposite to be true – how powerful is that!

The denouement is a wonderful image of a merry-go-round with a row of boys and girls playing and laughing together. For the first time (in the opinion of this reader) we get the voice of the child (versus the authoritative voice of censure) and the text switches from third to first person – 'Actually, anything is possible! We can play what we want to play and be what we want to be! The world will still go round!' Whereas up to now, the meaning has resided in the tension between the text and the images that undermine it, here the assertion is clear – that children's play (and through it their vision of future possibilities) should not be limited by narrow societal gender norms.

It's been three years since I acquired this amazing book and the possibilities it offers still leave me breathless. The clever yet simple device of the fold-outs and the use of the adult photos together pull off an enormously complex trick – that of addressing an hugely challenging topic in an innovative way which creates space for the child reader to make her/his own meaning. Instead of *telling* a child they have the right to play as they wish, the book *shows* the child a series of images that empowers them to reach the conclusion for themselves. In coming to reject the censorious voice of the text, child readers are empowered to reject *any* voice in society who would limit their right to play in any way.

[*What Are You Playing At?* was reviewed in *IBBYLink* 41 Autumn 2014.]

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Roger Marie-Sabine (illus. Anne Sol, trans. Nathalie Jelidi and Anna McQuinn) (2013) *What Are You Playing At?*. Slough: Alanna Books. [First published in France as *À quoi tu joues?* by Éditions Sarbacane in 2009.]

[Anna McQuinn has worked in children's publishing for almost 30 years, as an editor, writer and now a publisher of her own small list Alanna Books. After reading an MA in English, her entry into children's publishing was prompted by a conference on feminism in children's books run by Letterbox Library, where she met Verna Wilkins of Tamarind Books and was persuaded to join the Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources. Her experiences as a committee member informed her publishing and she has long worked to ensure that her books reflect the diverse world we live in and are populated by female heroes. She is best known for her book-loving, library-going hero Lulu. Concerned by the growing gentrification of children's books, toys, clothes and play, she acquired *What Are You Playing At?* in 2013.]

'Bears Can't Live in Houses with People, Can They ...?': Raymond Briggs' Picture Book *The Bear*

June Hopper Swain

British-born author/illustrator Raymond Briggs' picture books for children usually challenge the viewer in one way or another. While they can be humorous, they can also be uncompromising, and frequently blur the line between fantasy and realism. Certainly they invite total involvement. The grumpy old gent in *Father Christmas* (1973), the pleurably disgusting *Fungus the Bogeyman* (1977) and the gentle and poignant *The Snowman* (1978) are but a few of Briggs' memorable creations that remain ever popular.

To this memorable list one must surely add Briggs' picture book *The Bear* (1973), which is, happily, still in print, about a huge polar bear that climbs in through the bedroom window of a little girl called Tilly, and how they become inseparable companions. It is perceptive, amusing and poignant, for a bear cannot stay in a house forever, and it is distinctive, too, because the pictures have a very sensual quality.

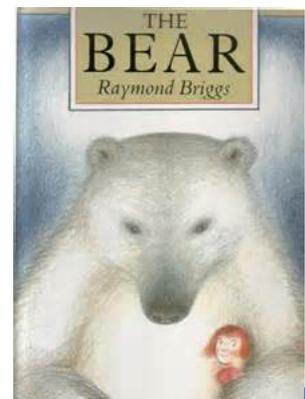
Some of the members of the team who created the highly successful and award-winning short animated film of *The Snowman*, which was first shown on Channel 4 television in the UK in December 1982, produced a wordless short animated television film adaptation, set to music, of *The Bear* that was first shown in the UK on Channel 4 on Christmas Eve 1998. While this is a delightful film it is surely the picture book that challenges our responses most and invites us to use our imaginations more.

Originally, by adopting a realistic approach with textured, broken pen strokes to create outline and form, twice Kate Greenaway Medal winner Briggs' drawing style was more conventional than that with which we are familiar today, but his attitude towards his art has ever remained the same. In *Artists of a Certain Line* (Ryder, 1960: 51), John Ryder quotes Briggs as saying that right from the start he knew that his future lay in illustration rather than in drawing and painting, an important distinction because illustration is, essentially, literary. As such, he wanted the protagonists in his illustrations to be more than mere components: they had to think and feel. It is this literary approach that has made Briggs' picture books so popular and memorable. One can feel that the human characters in them really inhabit their forms and the situations that they are in. Consequently, they 'ring true' and one can empathise with them. And so it is in *The Bear*.

The Bear is written partly in dialogue, and this gives the narrative a sense of immediacy, while those pictures that are wordless can invite the reader/viewer to

assume a narrative role. *The Bear*, like the other picture books mentioned above, draws on the cartoon-strip tradition. Thus, Briggs (b.1934) obtains his effects by using comic-strip conventions, such as frame-by-frame sequences and speech balloons, and cinematic devices that include close-ups that very effectively contrast with distance shots. Briggs uses these devices to the full not only for their cinematic qualities, but also for their emotional and dramatic possibilities.

On the front cover of *The Bear* the animal's massive bulk is established as are his huge paws with their sharp-looking claws that are accentuated by their overlapping slightly beyond the bottom of the picture into the cream border. This is a device that seems to bring the bear that much closer to the viewer. Beside the bear Tilly looks very small. Certain signifiers, however, serve to reassure the viewer and establish the nature of the relationship between the two main protagonists: Tilly's facial expression, as she looks out from behind the bear's paw, is playful, while the bear, with shoulders and paws relaxed, has a benign gaze that is directed down slightly in what might be a submissive gesture. Also, Briggs has chosen a shade of blue, a colour that can suggest affection and gentleness, to partly envelop both the child and the bear. Although within the picture book the animal makes direct eye contact with the viewer, his facial expression remains, as on the front cover, reassuringly gentle and rather passive.



As in *The Snowman* (1978), which is also a story of love and loss, it could be inferred that Tilly is an only child. With no companion of her own age, be it sibling or friend, apparent, the bear assumes an important function as a playmate and a surrogate child who remains amiable and docile – if somewhat unmanageable because of his size – throughout his visit. This gives Tilly, who, in appearance, is like a smaller version of her mother, the opportunity to assume a dominant role.

On the first page is a sequence of twelve small, comic-strip format pictures that show the bear entering, as night falls, the sleeping child's bedroom. These pictures are imbued with shades of violet and purple, which are colours that Nodelman has noted are sometimes associated with fantasy, moonlight and the night (1988: 62–63), and, indeed, they do set the narrative's overall mood here. The top three pictures have speech balloons, while those remaining are wordless. Tilly has been tucked up in bed for the night, her mother has given her a teddy bear to cuddle and tells her that Teddy will look after her and keep her safe. The reassuring register of her mother's words during what must be for Tilly a familiar and comforting ritual perhaps reveals that she is both sensitive and over-imaginative.

Because the curtains have been left undrawn, the viewer can look through the window and see what Tilly, who is gradually drifting off to sleep, cannot see. With the wintry light reflected from the snow outside brightening the room, the polar bear first appears as a smudgy charcoal-grey spot that, in successive pictures, gradually emerges out of the snow to become the recognisable form that climbs in through Tilly's window. When the bear reaches the house, the pad of his right paw, a black shape, is pressed against the outside of the window pane; then the window is prised open and a massive paw with long, sharp-looking claws, which contrast markedly with the tiny wool thread claws of Teddy, pushes through the opening. These nine pictures, in which a distant figure, at first not identifiable, comes gradually towards the viewer, are like part of a silent film where no subtitles are necessary. Nowhere else in this picture book does Briggs use a cinematic, frame-by-frame device quite so effectively and dramatically, for it can totally involve the viewer and allow the story to unfold moment to moment, lending it a sense of immediacy.

Some artistic licence has been employed in this cinematic sequence. As the window is brought closer to the viewer with each successive picture, the sleeping Tilly, with her teddy, should slip out of sight. She remains, however, within all 12 pictures, although only *just* in the final three, thus emphasising how closely Tilly and the bear are linked. Indeed, if one looks carefully at the third of the three top pictures, a faint shaft of light,

surely moonlight and the palest of creamy yellows, is just discernible shining down at an angle on that distant figure and through the window onto Tilly's face.

When the bear, a little further on in the pictorial narrative, gains complete access to Tilly's bedroom his immense shape is formed by the white of the paper with light pencil and crayon marks applied to suggest his rounded form. The quilt, the pillow and the bear – he is like a huge downy quilt being 'plumped up' and scarcely contained in such a small area – might be interchangeable as soft, warm comforters. Indeed, if we wanted to deny the magical element in this story, we might conclude that the bear is the child's projection, during sleep, of the feel of her own soft bedclothes and that of her beloved Teddy.

Tilly's sensual responses to the bear are reflected in both pictures and text. Her 'Mmmm' reveals her intense pleasure when the bear licks her cheek, and she presses her face against the bear's soft muzzle in greeting. Later, she expresses her delight at the way the bear's 'great big wet nostrils' blow hot air in her face and how his thick fur has a lovely 'dark and smoky smell'. This is surely expressing the same kind of earthy delight that children can derive from close contact with a family pet. Again, Briggs' choice of medium (pencil, crayon and the slightly smudgy shading and outlines) conveys this sensual softness.

The sequence of pictures that shows Tilly fussily cleaning up the bear's poo and wee, for he is not house trained, was going to be omitted from the animated version of *The Bear*, but Briggs felt that it was important to the narrative and insisted that it be retained. It gives the narrative a kind of earthy reality and makes the bear's existence more believable so that we might accept the fact that both bear and child do exist amiably together. Yet Tilly is already aware of the bear's elusive nature and that her hold on him is tenuous. She is in awe of the fact that her new friend is the 'silentest thing' she has ever known and like a 'great big white ghost' who 'just seems to vanish like magic'. Tilly wants the bear to stay with her forever and ever but her mother reminds her that 'he's a long way from home'. These signifiers surely anticipate the poignancy of the story's eventual outcome.

Through Briggs' pictures and text the viewer/reader can be drawn into Tilly's world and believe in the bear, as she believes in him. Tilly's parents, however, cannot. Her father's indulgent aside 'Aah! The wonderful world of a child's imagination' and the exaggerated nod-nod, wink-wink conspiratorial exchanges between her father and mother as they enter, not very convincingly, into the spirit of their daughter's make-believe game, can seem irritatingly patronising. This is surely the response that Briggs wants from us.

The ending of *The Bear* is rather different from that of *The Snowman* (1978) because Briggs takes the viewer beyond a distressed child's eloquent back view. It is, perhaps, no less effective for Tilly's very emotional outburst when she finds that the bear has gone is not quite the end of the story. Her reluctant acceptance of her father's explanation about what is real and what is unreal provides *her*, perhaps, with some kind of closure. Briggs takes the viewer, however, *beyond* Tilly's limited experience and understanding and so he/she is placed in a subjective position. What follows is a very effective contrast of mood in which fantasy is replaced by a more realistic scenario.

Thus, the final page shows a sequence of seven small images that depict the polar bear returning to his natural polar home of icebergs and snow. Yet he seems to be a very different bear from the one with whom Tilly played, if indeed it *is* the same bear. He appears sure-footed and, from his vantage point high up on the edge of a huge iceberg, which is blood red from the glow of the now rising sun, powerful and muscular. Could it be that Briggs, echoing Tilly's father's explanation, is simply showing the viewer how a real polar bear behaves? Be that as it may, before continuing on his journey the bear does look back once, and it is for the viewer to decide whether or not he is recalling a

little companion that he has left behind. The fifth small picture shows the bear swimming out in the icy water where another polar bear seems to be waiting for him. These are wordless, filmic images that can provide the viewer with a poignant and somewhat enigmatic ending.

While many of Briggs' stories have a magical or fantastic quality, he is too much of a realist to give them happy endings: as he pointed out in a rare interview that appeared in the Christmas 2012 issue of the television magazine *Radio Times*, the 'snowman melts, my parents died, animals die, flowers die ... It's a fact of life'. And, he might have added, a polar bear has to return home. Yet in *The Bear*, which has a narrative that is open to more than one interpretation, Briggs tempers some of life's harsh realities with a sensitivity that beautifully addresses one child's experience of love and loss. Thanks to Briggs' marvellous imagination, the skilful storytelling, the rich imagery and the narrative's subtle nuances, this is a picture book that the young and, perhaps, the not so young reader/viewer can enjoy and treasure.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbD9kyUapwl>.

[June Hopper Swain had been writing articles on children's books for several years when she enrolled on the MA Children's Literature Distance Learning Course at Roehampton University with Pat Pinsent as her tutor. She gained her degree in 2004. She has since written papers that have been published in the *Journal of Children's Literature Studies* and the *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*. For *IBBYLink* she has written short articles, reports on exhibitions and reviews of children's books.]

Jane Ray: Illustrations for the Nightingale Project

Judith Philo

An exhibition at:

South Kensington and Chelsea Mental Health Centre

1 Nightingale Place, London SW10 9NG

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm

Exhibition continues until 21 April 2017



Detail from *Green Tree*. Copyright © 2016 Jane Ray and the Nightingale Project.

Jane Ray is IBBY UK's nomination for the 2018 Hans Christian Andersen Award for her work as an illustrator. Melvin Burgess is the nominee for the category of author. These awards are the most prestigious in the international world of children's books.

The enchantingly entitled Nightingale Project, presumably in homage to Florence Nightingale, is a charity. Founded in 1998, their patron is Quentin Blake. In collaboration with numerous artists their aim is to promote the 'therapeutic use of high quality arts in healthcare', which they do by presenting temporary exhibitions in waiting rooms and supporting the creation of works of art for long-term use in hospital wards. In this way, these environments are transformed for the people who use them, patients, visitors and staff, and become attractive welcoming areas, rather than reflecting the characterless features of an institution.

The illustrations that Jane Ray produced for the Nightingale Project currently grace the walls of the Outpatient Department (details above). As you enter the department the presence of the paintings is immediately apparent. Four paintings entitled 'Foliate Heads' lead you forward. The first one gives an impression of someone who is withdrawn, in a deep sleep, her mouth drooping. She wears a simple white shift. Her hair is short and downy like new growth, and small leafless trees sprout from her scalp. Overhead the sky is grey with a hint of cloud and birds in the far distance. A few gold stars gleam faintly and white dots suggest snow in the atmosphere. The remaining background is featureless. The second face, also depicted in sleep is more vibrant. Her face is framed by thick dark hair; there is colour in her cheeks; a hint of a smile suggests that she is dreaming. Her shift is scarlet, decorated with gold stars and snowflakes. The image of a fox is imprinted on her forehead. The small figure of a deer appears to be standing on her shoulder, a bird is perched on the other. Are they dream images or memories I wonder to myself? The surrounding sky is blue, gold stars are present and

birds in flight. The third head is that of a young woman. Her cheeks are flushed and her bright dark eyes rest directly on the viewer. She wears a straw hat embellished with a nest that sprouts green shoots and in which an exotic bird sits trailing elegant tail feathers. Round her neck is a necklace of red berries. There is nothing in the background, she is entirely present.



Foliate Head 1, Foliate Head 2, Foliate Head 3, Foliate 4 (in margin). Copyright © 2016 Jane Ray and the Nightingale Project.

The half-length figure of a woman completes this group of paintings. She gazes directly at the viewer, her expression serious and thoughtful. Her dark hair is covered by a blue cotton headscarf with a gold motif. The neckline of her simple blue dress is trimmed with gold braid. In both hands she holds a blue ceramic bowl, whose inner surface is grey. The bowl is filled with water which reflects blue sky and white clouds as if to confirm that beyond the grey sky above there is fair weather to come. This is a very moving painting, more so when one learns that during the process of her work Jane Ray had a dream in which she carried a deep bowl of water which reflected the sky.



These paintings were the start of Jane Ray's work after she had visited a ward which she describes as 'fresh and clean, but featureless', and she had spoken with some of the women there. Sensing their deep distress, she says:

I felt there was a need for positive imagery: not just cheery pictures, but images that would tap into something deeper. I painted images from human heads – expressing the energy and creativity of the teeming mind. Hats and masks began to appear on the heads, and then a tree grew out of a boat being rowed by a woman with a flourishing crown, guided by birds and stars. Ultimately a series of trees emerged, their branches full of birds, embodying themes of rootedness, growth, hope and freedom. These in the end, were the ones we chose for the wards.

The painting *Guided by Birds and Stars* caught my attention with its flowing narrative life. I found the rich shades of the main colours, blues and greens, immensely satisfying. I could imagine spending time with this picture letting myself be in that boat. A label beside it indicated that this image had been transferred onto a wall of a hospital ward.

When I reached the end of the exhibition I could understand why the series of trees were selected for the wards. Whatever the season, the branches of the trees are filled with birds.

As Jane Ray writes, the themes that they (the trees) embody of rootedness, growth, hope and freedom are enduring ones. Imagery of the natural world puts us in touch with the wellsprings within ourselves, the potential of our own lives.



***Guided by Birds and Stars.* Copyright © 2016 Jane Ray and the Nightingale Project.**

I was reminded of cave paintings by some of the motifs and animal images in the paintings I had seen. To me they resembled an imprint of early memories, even of intimations that we all have of ‘things’ not yet thought or named, in John Clare’s phrase in his poem ‘The Nightingale’s Nest’, ‘like a thought unborn’. Poetry came to my mind several times, nursery rhymes, Ted Hughes’s ‘Thought Fox’ and Siegfried Sassoon’s poem ‘Everyone Sang’:

Suddenly everyone burst out singing
And I was filled with joy
As prisoned birds must find in freedom

I hope that the people who use the services of this centre and those who visit this temporary exhibition will be moved by these paintings, whose imagery has the power to tap into something deeper within us all. What a gift, and what an opportunity to see Jane Ray’s work off the page.

A [video](#) describing the project is voiced by Jane Ray, speaking about the project and her work for it. For more information on the project, see www.nightingaleproject.org.

Acknowledgements

All illustrations and a link to the video were supplied by the Nightingale Project with help from Jane Ray.

[Judith Philo has had experience in nursing, midwifery and social work, particularly with young families. After completing a Jungian training she practised as a Jungian analytical psychotherapist. She has taken seminars with trainees on myths and fairy tales. She is now retired. She has had a lifelong interest in dreams and imagery linked to her personal experience and also her analytic training and practice. In 2003 she completed an MA in Children’s Literature at the University of Surrey, Roehampton. She wrote her dissertation on dream narratives in six mid-to-late twentieth-century children’s novels. For many years she helped pupils in Years 5 and 6 with guided reading in her local primary school. She maintains her interest in Children’s Literature, and is currently Book Review Editor for *IBBYLink*.]

REVIEWS

Storybooks, Novels and Tales

The Dragon's Hoard: Stories from the Viking Sagas

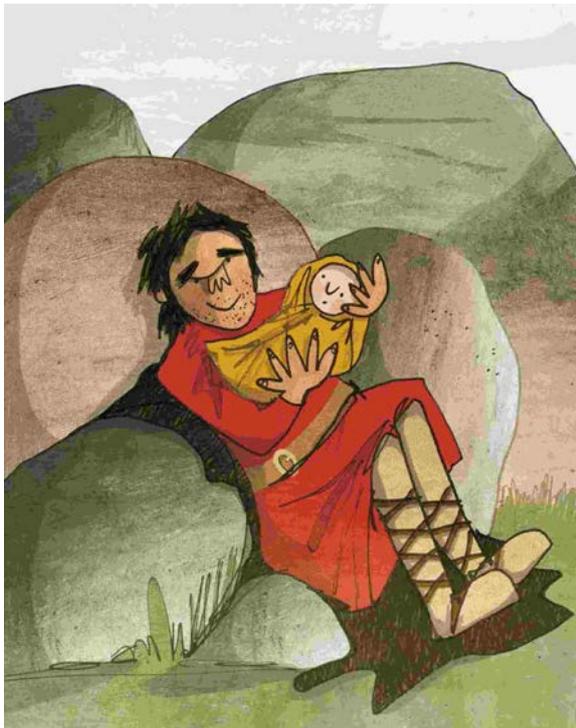
Lari Don, illus. Cate James, hb. 978 1 8478 0681 9, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books (Janetta Otter-Barry Books), 2016, £14.99, 64pp. [Legends, 8–11 years.
Keywords: sagas; Vikings; gods, fighting; ships; feasts; Iceland; historical.]

The front cover with a dragon and a Viking warrior sets the context. 'About the Viking Sagas' states 'These are the stories the Vikings told about themselves. [They] were mostly written down in the 13th and 14th centuries, about events the writers believed had happened several centuries earlier'.

There are 13 stories, each of which gives its provenance and is headed by a symbolic illustration. For example, the first story is 'The Dragon's Head' from the Saga of the Vulsungs. The heading illustration is a framed dragon's head. It is a story of Loki, the Viking god of mischief, who often caused trouble deliberately. 'But one morning he caused trouble entirely by accident.' Loki is walking by the river and sees an otter dragging a plump salmon. He fancies the salmon for his breakfast and the otter's fur would be valuable. However the otter was a man who was a shape-shifter and the man's brothers are outraged and demand payment. With a title including the word 'dragon', the stories takes many unexpected turns. The moral is unusual!

'The Berserker's Baby' is from the Vatnsdal Saga. The berserker is Thorir and the heading illustration shows him looking very fierce and biting his own shield in his impatience to get at the enemy. Berserkers were the most feared Viking warriors. However, Thorir was tired of being a berserker but no one knew a way to stop being one. One day on a walk in the hills he heard a thin wailing cry and high on a cold rock he found a baby wrapped in a blanket. He looked at the sun far off and said:

I wish to stop being a berserker. And this baby wishes to live. God of the Sun, if I promise to care for this child, will you lift the curse of being a berserker from my shoulders?



From 'The Berserker's Baby' p.20. Illustration credited to Cate James, *The Dragon's Hoard*, Frances Lincoln Children's Books 2016. Reproduced with permission.

I leave you to guess the ending!



Other tales are from many different sagas and tell of kings, warriors, ladies, the wise, the foolish, animals (mythical and real) and every imaginable situation. I will mention just one more from the Saga of King Heidrek the Wise: 'Odin's Riddles'. 'One day the king decreed that he would grant a royal favour to any man who could ask him a riddle he couldn't answer.' Well, an old enemy of the king asks Odin for help and, of course, trickery is involved. You can try your luck with this one!

Women who sleep on a hard bed,
Who do not stir when the weather is still,
But who wake in the wind.
They put on their white hoods,
Then walk amongst the skerries.
Who are they?

When you have bought the book you will find the answer on p.54.

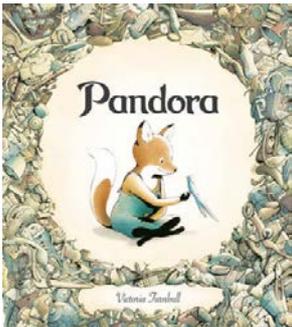
This is a book for all the family to enjoy. The writing is excellent and compels you to get to the end of each story. Once you get used to the stylised faces, the illustrations, many full page, enhance the story and are coloured according to the scene. The print is clear for reading and the book well designed. A section at the end of the book 'Where I Found these Stories' gives interesting background notes. I have enjoyed it very much.

Jennifer Harding

Pandora

Victoria Turnbull, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books), hb. 978 1 8478 0749 6, 2016, £11.99, 32pp. [Fable, 4–8 years. Keywords: anthropomorphic fox; wasteland regeneration.]

This is a stunning book. The cover design in addition to the satin-bound hardcover is instantly alluring. This is a book that one has to hold and caress. Once held, of course, one wants to see more of the illustrations and thus starts the 32-page journey.



Pandora in her wasteland. Copyright © 2016 Victoria Turnbull.

This is a lyrical book about regeneration, revival and hope. Pandora, a beautiful fox, lives alone in a wasteland of discarded, broken things. She makes her home from things she has repaired, mended and recycled. One day, she finds a bird with a broken wing. Pandora does what comes best to her – nurtures the bird back to health and he starts to fly again. The bird, in return, brings her seeds and seedlings from far. When one day the bird doesn't return, Pandora is heartbroken and lonely. But unknown to her the seedlings have taken root and now her world is transforming. When finally Pandora wills herself to look around, she sees a lush wonderland has grown where there were only unending mounds of cast-offs before. Hope surges back and recreates a world of

possibilities. A gentle book with sparse text and detailed, evocative images set in a fantastical yet recognisable world with a strong message. Highly recommended.

For more inside illustrations: <https://victurnbull.com/portfolio/pandora/>.

Soumi Dey is a PhD candidate at Glasgow University.

Welcome to Nowhere

Elizabeth Laird, London: Macmillan, pb. 978 1 5098 4049 6, 2017, £9.99, 352pp. [Novel, age 10+. Keywords: Middle East; wars; refugee camp; disability; danger; asylum seekers; journey.]

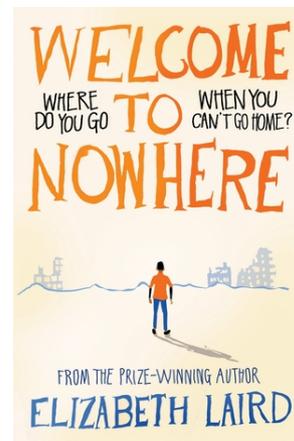
Elizabeth Laird's extensive periods of life in the Middle East, together with her more recent visit to refugee camps in Jordan, make her uniquely qualified to write this book about the experience of a family forced by war to leave their home in Syria and seek asylum in that adjacent country. The central character, Omar, is brought to life not only by the vividly realistic evocation of atmosphere but also by the solidity of the depiction of the other family members, including his brother Musa, whose high intelligence is often unrecognised by people who are more immediately aware of his cerebral palsy. Other family members include Omar's intransigent father, and his mother who is just beginning to act on the realisation that her opinions can be at least as valid as her husband's. I don't want to reveal too much of the story: the interaction between these and many other characters means that it is far from being just a journey narrative, so that the reader's attention is held right to the end.

Evidence of Laird's commitment to a part of the world too often in the news for the wrong reasons is to be found in the subject matter of many of her books. *Kiss the Dust* (1992) focuses on a family in northern Iraq during the conflict between Saddam Hussein's forces and the Kurds. *A Little Piece of Ground* (2003, written in collaboration with Sonia Nimr, a Palestinian university lecturer and storyteller) is centred on the very natural desire of some Palestinian boys to have somewhere to play football. *The Garbage King* (2003) makes use of Laird's extensive knowledge of Ethiopia and its poverty. *Oranges in No Man's Land* (2006) is set in Lebanon during the civil war. Additionally, Laird has done pioneering work in the collection of Ethiopian folk stories (see www.ethiopianfolktales.com).

Profits from *Welcome to Nowhere* are being donated to a charity (see www.mandalatrust.org), which supports schools in Jordan created for refugee children; the teachers are also refugees, trained and qualified before they had to leave their own country. Inevitably such schools need books, paper, pencils, etc., as well as basic facilities and running costs. But don't read this book simply because it is supporting a good cause! It is a thoroughly absorbing read in its own right, as might be expected from someone who combines skill as a writer with the kind of desire for authenticity that motivates her to travel to places that many people would shun as too dangerous.

[This piece is also published in *Network*, the journal of Women Word Spirit (WWS).]

Pat Pinsent



Picture, Picture Storybooks and Novelty Books

A Bottle of Happiness

Pippa Goodhart, illus. Ehsan Abdollahi, London: Tiny Owl Publishing, hb. 978 1 9103 2820 0, 2016, £12.99, 28pp. [Picture book, 4–8 years. Keywords: happiness; rich versus poor.]

This is a delightful and heart-warming picture book both for the message it carries, that happiness is more precious than possessions, and for its vibrant, innovative illustrations.

The people on one side of a mountain work hard and are rich and want to get even richer, while those on the other side of the mountain work hard too but, through no fault of their own, are poor, and have just enough food to eat and clothes to wear if they share things with each other. Pim, a young boy from this group of poor people, journeys from his side of the mountain to the other to find out what life is like for those living there. In their market place he finds that the people have an abundance of everything material but they are not very happy. In exchange for some fruit, Pim agrees to pay a stallholder with what his own people have in abundance: happiness. Back home he collects this in a bottle, along with some laughter, music and love, and takes it back to the stallholder and his people. Their lives are transformed, and now the people on *both* sides of the mountain share everything with each other and are very, very happy.



British-born Pippa Goodhart has written many children's books, including the prize-winning picture book *You Choose* (2003) as well as the *Winnie the Witch* stories (originally created by Valerie Thomas) that she writes under the pen name Laura Owen.

Iranian artist Ehsan Abdollahi was inspired by the surroundings, fabrics and clothes of the people of southern Iran when working on the illustrations for this picture book, and the story is brought vividly to life in the vibrant watercolours and clear-cut patchwork patterns that are made even more vibrant and sharp by his skilful use of white throughout.

[For an interview with the artist that includes a discussion of this book, see <http://tinyowl.co.uk/a-childs-language-is-an-international-language/>.]

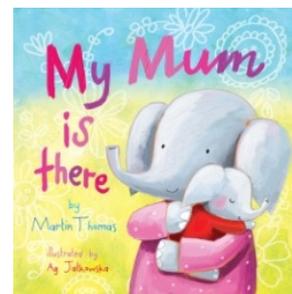
June Hopper Swain

My Mum is There

Martin Thomas, illus. Ag Jatkowska, London: Wacky Bee Books, pb. 978 0 9931 1093 1, 2016, £6.99, 18pp. [Picture book, 2–4 years. Keywords; rhyming text; motherhood; anthropomorphic elephant.]

My Dad Will Do

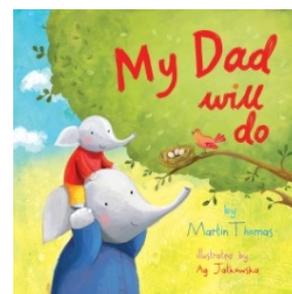
Martin Thomas, illus. Ag Jatkowska, London: Wacky Bee Books, pb. 978 0 9931109 4 8, £6.99, 2016, 18pp. [Picture book, 2–4 years. Keywords: rhyming text; fatherhood; anthropomorphic elephant.]



In these two titles, published by Wacky Bee Books, a new independent publishing company, there is a simplicity and charm that can appeal directly to the young reader. In both picture books there are reassuring first-person texts in verse by Martin Thomas that, seen from the perspective of an appealing little toddler elephant, can speak directly to early readers who are also learning new words and new concepts.

Mum bakes cakes and teaches her little son his alphabet, and, at weekends, Dad gives him bread and jam at teatime and takes him to the park to play on the swings. Thus, with a loving parent always close by, each picture book describes a comfortable and familiar routine that the young reader can respond to. The font used is Kiddish and it gives the text a hand-written appearance that complements both words and pictures.

These innovative and painterly pictures by Polish-born Ag (Agnieszka) Jatkowka, who lives and works in the UK, and who also illustrates Usborne's *Dress the Teddy Bears* sticker books, have a playful element, and their bright colours and simple shapes can have, like the texts, a direct appeal to the early reader.



June Hopper Swain

The Ammuchi Puchi

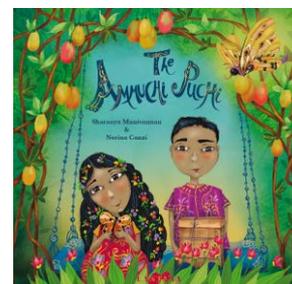
Sharanya Manivannan, illus. Nerina Canzi, London: Lantana Publishing, pb. 978 1 9113 7302 5, 2016, £6.99, 32pp. [Picture book, 6–10 years. Keywords: storybook, beginner reader; bereavement; grandparent.]

A gentle story of love and the coming to terms with the loss of a loved one, this is a little boy Aditya's cherished memories of a much-loved grandmother Ammuchi, who liked to sing and tell him and his sister Anjali scary ghost stories.

One evening, not long after Ammuchi died, and Aditya and Anjali are sitting in the garden, a big, beautiful butterfly, very much like the butterfly brooch that Ammuchi had given Anjali for her seventh birthday, came and first alighted on Aditya's nose and then on Anjali's head. Anjali was convinced that it was Ammuchi Puchi (Puchi being the name of an insect). Another day, the butterfly flew into the house and led the two children to Ammuchi's old room and to something that had been packed away there that would become Aditya's tenth birthday present. While they never saw the butterfly again after this, Aditya felt that Ammuchi was often watching over them.

Sharanya Manivannan, who received the 2008–2009 Lavanya Sankaran Fellowship that is open to Indian writers working in English, particularly in fiction, is an Indian poet whose poetic lyricism shines through in her perceptive text for this picture book.

The vibrantly coloured accompanying illustrations by Argentinian Nerina Canzi, who received the National and Latin American Prize for Children's and Youth Literature for her illustrations for Constancio C. Vigil's *La Hormigueta viajera* (1995), set the scene with detailed fabric designs, a fantastic bird with gorgeous plumes and trees laden with luscious exotic fruit.





June Hopper Swain

A Year Full of Stories: 52 Folk Tales and Legends from Around the World

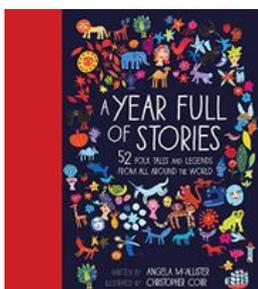
Angela McAllister, illus. Christopher Corr, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0859 2, 2016, £12.99, 128pp. [Picture storybook, 7–11 years. Keywords: illustrated; stories; cultures; diversity; folktales; legends; festivals; religion.]

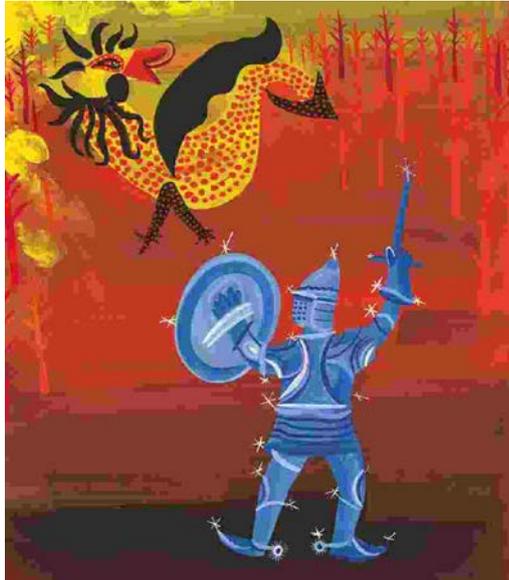
This is a striking book to own. It is highly illustrated with full-colour pictures, many of them taking a whole page. This is large hardback book and, perhaps especially because it may be difficult for a child to hold, it is ideal for an adult to read to a child. The text is dense, so it is more than a picture book.

There are 52 stories included in this volume, so possibly one for each week of the year. That may be one way to consume the stories. There is also an acceptable alternative: each story is attached to a particular event. This is where diversity begins. There are festivals from diverse religions, such as Easter, Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr. Time markers such as New Year's Day, Springtime and Harvest are also included. Saints are remembered. Secular events are also acknowledged: World Oceans Day, World Music Day and International Day of Friendship. There is more diversity in that the stories come from all around the world. There is also a pleasing gender balance. A handy glossary at the end of the book explains all the events.

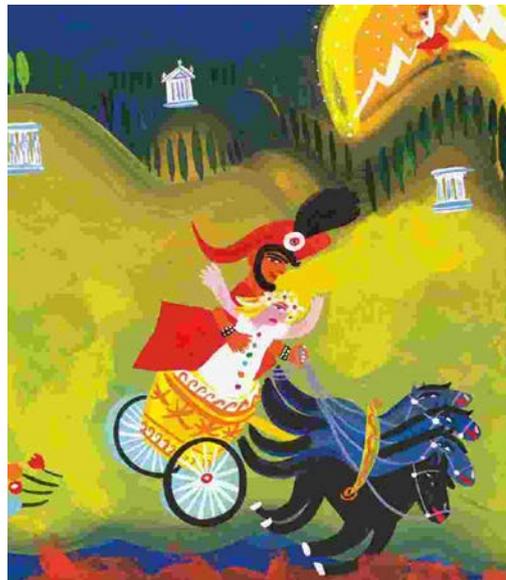
A narrative balance within each text makes them palatable to both young readers and adults. There is something of the storyteller voice in each one, particularly at the beginning: 'Once there Lived a Man' (p.6), 'One Winter's Day' (p.8), 'Long Ago there Was a Farmer' (p.12). Often, just as in the classic fairy stories, characters are not named. McAllister refers to 'a lonely princess' (p.16), 'a mole and his wife' (p.20), 'three young hunters' (p.39). Yet almost as often we are given names: Gelert and Llewlyn (p.24), David (p.28), Donal O Malley (p.30). In any case, each text contains a good balance of description, action, dialogue and a minimum of exposition. The stories are short, with a few taking only one side and even these are illustrated. There are none that take more than two sides. This makes them easily digestible. However, though the stories are short, each one gives food for thought and will stay with the reader for a long time.

The illustrations often tell a little more of the story, though not quite as much as they do in picture books. The detail in them is worth studying and this enhances the enjoyment of the text.





From 'The Glass Knight'



From 'Persephone: An Ancient Greek Story'

This would make an excellent book to be read at school assemblies for junior school children (aged 7–11). However, one would need to make sure they could also see the pictures.

Gill James

The Little Pioneer

Adam Hancher, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0798 4, 2016, £11.99, 32pp. [Picture book, 8–12 years. Keywords: pioneers; USA; historical; adventure.]

'A young girl's story ...'

The author is an illustrator with an interest in the American West. He became fascinated with the pioneers' stories of their journeys of over 2000 miles from the East Coast to the far West. Here is how the story begins:

In the fall of 1849, Papa passed on.
He left to us a new homestead, but it was so far away.

'A new life!' declared Ma as we piled our belongings
into the rickety wooden wagon.

Spring had arrived, and we were
moving to California.

The text is written over the clouds and below shows the mother and daughter in what is presumed to be their current homestead and a wagon awaits them in the distance. Each page is designed in a similar fashion with text interspersed between or within the illustration(s). The text is mainly clear, although not quite so when night time is displayed as in the following illustration.

The illustration below shows them happy and singing as the journey is going well. However, 'for months, we labored on ... The good times passed and hardship followed'. Disaster then strikes the young girl:

We stopped for rest. Never had I slept so soundly ... Trouble was, when I awoke I was all alone.

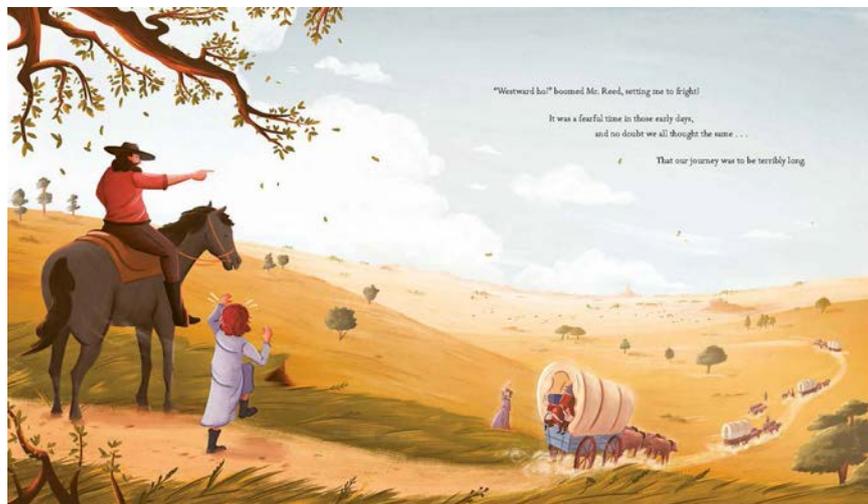




‘With fire came toasted bread, biscuits and buffalo stew. Our company felt like a family. Mr Reed was quite at home out in the wilderness, but I had much to learn.’ Copyright © 2016 Adam Hencher. From *The Little Pioneer* Frances Lincoln Children’s Books. Reproduced with permission.

It is winter. She remembers what she has been taught, gathers leaves, bark, branches and a flint and stone and lights a fire. But ‘what was that creeping towards me out of the shadows?’ as she imagines it is a bear approaching. I won’t spoil the story nor show you the final illustration.

The story is well told and describes the pattern of what has often been told of these early pioneers who travelled from the eastern states of America to California in search of a better life. The illustrations give a good impression of the vast open landscapes and the swollen rivers that had to be crossed.



‘It was a fearful time in those early days ... our journey was to be horribly long.’ Copyright © 2016 Adam Hencher. From *The Little Pioneer* Frances Lincoln Children’s Books. Reproduced with permission.

The book is an excellent introduction to children who are learning the history of this era. I have not come across Adam Hancher before and I like his slightly stylised illustrations that convey much of the story in this book. I should have preferred UK English spelling to have been used for the text!

Jennifer Harding

Geronimo: The Dog Who Thinks He's a Cat

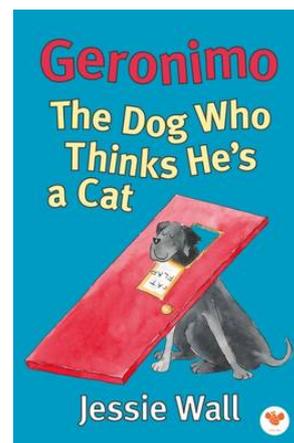
Jessie Wall, illus. Emily Stanbury, London: Wacky Bee Books, pb. 978 0 9931 1090 0, 2015, £5.99, 73pp. [Picture storybook, 4–9 years. Keywords: dogs; cats; strays; pets; humour; mixed race; diversity.]

Geronimo is a delightful story of a dog who is born to a homeless mother who struggles to look after all her pups. Geronimo decides to go and see the world, getting as far as the next door garden, where he adopts a family and grows up as one of their pet cats. As Geronimo grows bigger (and bigger and bigger), his refusal to accept that he is a dog starts causing problems for the family, and his place in the home is threatened. However, after a heroic rescue, Geronimo accepts himself for the dog that he is, and his human family love him for being himself. As a story of fitting in and finding your place in the world, *Geronimo* hits a perfect balance of heart and humour, never falling into the saccharine as so many similar stories do.

The illustrations in this book are very successful in creating a really rounded sense of the characters, complementing the writing by providing much of the description that is not included in the words. As such, the words and pictures work together very well, each allowing the other to inform the reader without ever becoming contradictory or repetitive. It is also great to see that the illustrator, Emily Stanbury, has chosen to represent the family as being of mixed race, providing some welcome diversity.

Linguistically, *Geronimo* is an ideal book for beginner or less confident readers (and indeed is marketed as such). The language is generally quite straightforward, but provides enough phonetically tricky words to develop reading skills without being so difficult as to become off-putting. It is also a good length, as it is long enough to tell a satisfactorily complete story, but not so long as to require being read in many sessions, which might make it difficult for children to remember the ongoing story. The quality of the book also means that it is likely to appeal to slightly older readers (up to 8 or 9) who are less fluent, as well as younger beginning readers. This book would also be suitable as a read-aloud or read-along.

Jen Aggleton is a PhD student at the University of Cambridge.



Hiccups

Holly Sterling, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0674 1, 2016, £11.99, 32pp. [Picture book, 3+ years. Keywords: dogs; hiccups; dressing up; language.]

Ruby and Oscar (her dog) are enjoying their favourite game one day when Oscar gets hiccups.

We are taken through this tale by way of a wonderful series of lively, subtly coloured illustrations in which Ruby tries all kinds of things to stop Oscar's hiccups. Nothing seems to work, even magic, until she has the bright idea of dressing up in her cat costume. Oscar is so shocked when the big cat appears that the hiccups stop!

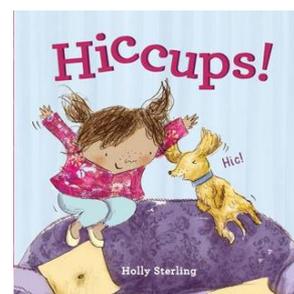
This enchanting story is told not only through lovely illustrations but with plenty of onomatopoeic noises for the child to repeat out loud.

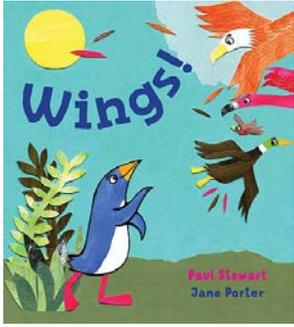
Cleverly, the final picture is of Ruby and Oscar resuming their game when all of a sudden Ruby suddenly 'hics'!

Young children will find a great deal of fun in this book and no doubt want to read it over and over again.

I recommend this delightful book, not only for its charming artwork but also for its clever use of language that will enchant both adult and child in equal measures.

Shirley Hobson





Wings

Paul Stewart, Illus. Jane Porter, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, hb. 978 1 9109 5943 5, 2016, £11.99, 40pp. [Picture storybook. 3–7 years. Keywords: early reader; friendship; team work; self-esteem; humour.]

Wings is a very colourful book that is essentially about friendship, team work and building self-esteem. This delightful story of Penguin who yearns to fly is told with humorous text and lovely multi-coloured collages. It is amusing and lively while imparting the information so that it will appeal to adults and children alike.



Penguin's friends Ostrich, Flamingo and Emu, try to convince him that it is much better to stay on the ground and walk. However, Penguin still desires to fly and Owl promises to teach him but amusingly fails! There is a wonderful illustration of Owl with his wing round Penguin in sympathy with his plight.

Eventually his many friends who can fly all help by tying strings to him and taking the happy Penguin up into the air with them. Of course, the strings break but fortunately this happens above water so the lesson that Penguin learns is that his wings are meant to take him flying down to the bottom of the ocean.

This charming tale is reminiscent of Aesop's fables. The book is beautiful to look at and has just the right amount of text to go with the pictures to tell this delightful story.

[For more illustrations from this book: www.otterbarrybooks.com/wings/.]

Shirley Hobson

Alone Together

Clayton Junior, London: words & pictures, hb. 078 1 7849 3627 3, 2016, £11.99, 24pp. [Picture book, 2+ years. Keywords: early learning; opposites; animals; birds; insects.]

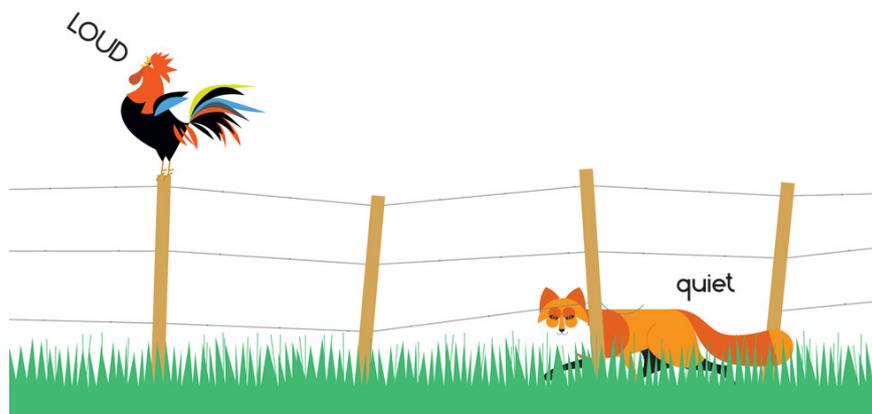
This is a lovely, unusual book that will help very young children to understand the concept of 'opposites'.

The bold, colourful illustrations will encourage the new reader to explore the pages and gain an understanding of what it means to contrast all manner of objects through the clever use of animals, birds and insects.

The pages are beautifully designed; in particular the clever use of white space enhances the illustrations with just one necessary word on each page. For example, the double-page spread where monkeys are moving through the trees while in contrast a heron stands still.



The use of one-word clues is brilliant as it will enable the adult to spark a conversation about what it all means. This device will encourage children to expand their vocabulary and engage their curiosity.



Clayton Junior is a Brazilian illustrator. His book is eye catching and bold. The modern design and amazing artwork is cleverly executed. *Alone Together* will no doubt help to develop speech and understanding in very young children.

I wouldn't be surprised if this lovely book becomes a classic!

[For further illustrations from this book, see www.claytonjunior.com/Alone-Together.]

Shirley Hobson

One Cheetah, One Cherry: A Book of Beautiful Numbers

Jackie Morris, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, pb. 978 1 9109 5928 2, 2016, £12.99, 28pp.
[Picture book, 3–6 years. Keywords: counting; animals; numbers.]

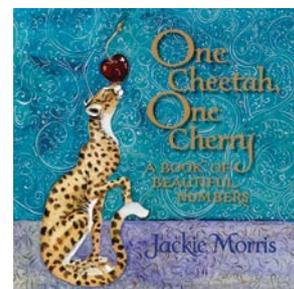
Internationally acclaimed British author and illustrator Jackie Morris has come up in *One Cheetah, One Cherry* with a gorgeous counting book that brings animals and numbers together in exotic combinations.

Counting one to ten seems a wonderful excuse to immerse oneself into this fantastic imagery, in which elephants, tigers, foxes and panda bears play with food, toys and among themselves.

These animals, which bring along so many ancient and new narratives and layers of meaning, are here frozen in time in dignified poses that are both lyrical and mysterious. They are often depicted in pairs or families, and the images suggest an abundance of love and tenderness towards one another.

The surprise is presented by the unusual pair of the cheetah and the cherry, which by the end of the book become 'Ten cherries, one cheetah', to suddenly become 'No cherries, one cheetah', in an interesting twist that also presents to the little ones the abstract concept of 0, or none.

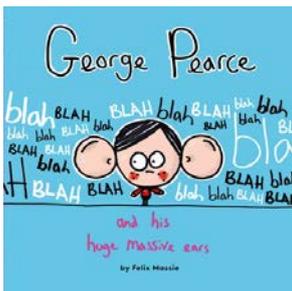
This is visually represented as the beautiful pattern that accompanies most of the scenes, and fades out in the right side of the spread, while the left is richly decorated and presents the traces of the cheetah's mischief, the seeds of the 10 cherries now gone. As the subtitle suggests, this book makes, through a richly aesthetic reading experience, the beauty of numbers come to life.





'One Cheetah, Seven Cherries' from *A Book of Beautiful Numbers* by Jackie Morris, published by Otter-Barry Books. Text and illustration copyright © Jackie Morris 2016. Reproduced with permission.

Aline Frederico is a graduate student in the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.



George Pearce and his Huge Massive Ears

Felix Massie, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0794 6, 2016, £11.99, 32pp. [Picture book, 4+ years. Keywords: identity; rhyming text; friends.]

This delightful picture book from the author of *Terry Brown and his Upside Down Frown* is aimed at children from 4 years old, and gently and humorously addresses the important issue of finding your own identity and being true to yourself.

George is introduced as having 'huge massive ears', which, rather than allowing him to fly, pick up everyone else's thoughts and opinions, both good and bad. This is quickly shown as being a problem, as George is so overwhelmed by everyone else's views that he can't make up his own mind about anything. It gets so bad that he ends up with 100 favourite foods and 200 favourite hats!

When George blocks his ears to quieten the din, he begins to hear the tiny voice inside him that encourages him to think and decide for himself. He starts to pick his own favourites and soon discovers that when he doesn't pretend, others can see the real him and so become his friends.

The story ends with George still listening to others but now not always agreeing with them, together with the very emphatic assertion that 'Only one person can make up my mind, and that's me!'

The clear rhyming couplet structure and consistent rhythm of the text, combined with the charming childlike illustrations and the endearing character of George, make this picture book very accessible and immediately appealing to children. Bright colours are contrasted with duller greyscale elements to emphasise George's emotions and the events of the story, while handwritten text in the illustrations is used to demonstrate the thoughts and opinions that George can hear; usually shown as 'Blah, blah, blah.'

George Pearce and his Huge Massive Ears conveys an important message to children about discovering who they truly are and asserting their own identity, which is especially significant in our social-media age.

It is perhaps particularly useful to read with those who are easily influenced by the opinions of others, but all children will enjoy this quirky and colourful picture book that teaches an important life lesson in a comical and engaging way.

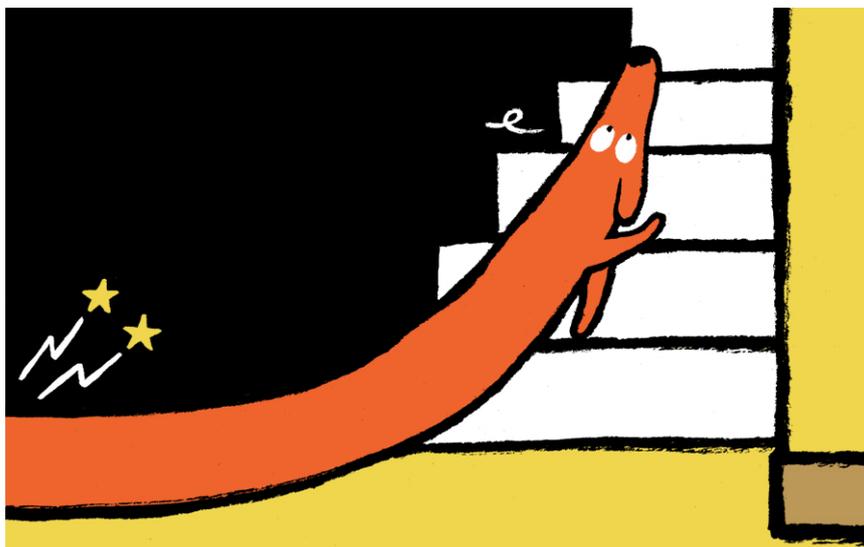
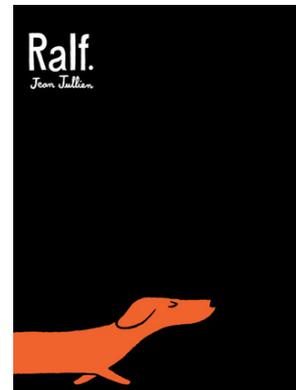
Anna Purkiss has taught in Key Stage 1 for several years and is now studying for an MPhil in Education (Children's Literature) at the University of Cambridge.

Ralf

Jean Jullien, collaborator Gwendal Le Bec, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0818 9, 2016, £10.99, 56pp. [Picture book, 3+ years. Keywords: wordless; dogs; fire.]

Pet owners young and old will instantly recognise Ralf the dachshund: eager to be the centre of attention, he tends to 'get in the way' of family life. Being a 'sausage dog,' his length certainly doesn't help. The awkwardness of his body shape causes mishap after mishap, from interrupting mum's shower to disrupting dad's ironing. Eventually, he is banished to the kennel outside.

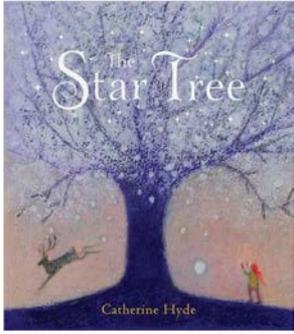
The twist (and there is indeed a pun in here) comes when Ralf discovers a smouldering iron left unattended in the night – danger! He wants to warn his family, but his body becomes an obstacle once more by getting stuck in the flap door. This time, however, Ralf develops the surprising ability to stretch himself as far as he needs to notify the fire brigade, winding himself up the stairs, down the window, and onto the fire truck. Saved and reunited with their hero, the family celebrates Ralf's new length. Whereas the story begins on a conventional tone, the development is counter-intuitive: readers will delight at the ingenuity of Ralf's elasticity. Yet unlike a piece of elastic, he retains the length he has gained. The happy ending emphasises an acceptance of what was previously a nuisance: the solution will 'simply' be to build a bigger house, and Ralf coils up happily for a snooze. Jullien's illustrations – unusually coloured in brownish tones such as olive green and mustard yellow – are neat, straightforward and unambiguous. It is a shame that the fold breaks up his minimalist tableaux, clearly inspired by Jullien's graphic-design background, as it is meant to be taken in as a whole.



While dogs will continue to capture the imagination, some dogs are more special than others. Ralf may become especially special to those who appreciate the peculiar eccentricities of the elongated dachshund.

[For more illustrations from this book: www.jeanjullien.com/work-180-ralf.html.]

Astrid Van den Bossche is a DPhil student in consumer studies at the University of Oxford.



The Star Tree

Catherine Hyde, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0672 7, 2016, £9.99, 32pp. [Picture book, 4–8 years. Keywords: dreams; magic; myth.]

The Star Tree paints the story of Mia and her dream journey to the magical Star Tree. Catherine Hyde is a painter first and foremost, and the illustrations are fantastic, with mythical and magical undertones. The colours are soothing pastels, calming yet engaging, and the dream world the story takes place in seems to be in a perpetual magic hour. As Mia journeys closer to the centre of a dream world, the colours and brush strokes of the land or water and the sky blur into one, creating a surreal dreamlike image. The language used has the same gentle flow as the pictures that go with it, melting into the images of the page. This book is best enjoyed read out loud, and there are plenty of clues for the reader for intonation and emphasis, and in the font and the placement of lines. Not all lines rhyme, when they do it is a wonderful effect to highlight that bit of the text. That said, the rhyme schemes are not consistent, which creates a dissonance and disturbs the peace of the pastel dreams.



This picture book is very suitable as a bedtime story for children from ages 4 to 8. Its gentle tones and images spin a meditative dream that is strangely ethereal and captivating throughout.

[For more illustrations from this book: [https://catherinehyde.co.uk/general-news/star-tree-review/.](https://catherinehyde.co.uk/general-news/star-tree-review/)]

Vera Veldhuizen is a PhD student at the University of Cambridge.

Following the Tractor

Susan Steggall, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, pb. 978 1 8478 0657 4, 2015, £6.99, 32pp. [Picture storybook, 3–6 years. Keywords: tractor; farming; countryside; harvesting; rhyme.]

Undoubtedly a picture book about a red tractor has built-in appeal for many young readers. This creation is part of a series of transport books for 3–6 year olds by enterprising Susan Steggall, who has already produced *Busy Wheels* on boats, cars, diggers, buses and trains. A farmer uses his tractor in a typical year and we follow him, learning about the cycle of farm activities.

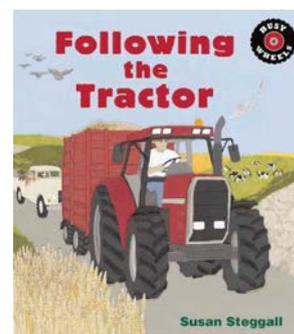
Double-page spreads in a large format with clear black text against a lighter background allow the author to display an ingenious variety of torn-paper collages. The seasons unfold as we turn the pages, beginning with the tractor helping to pull the plough to sow crops in the hard, wintry ground. The illustrations allow the child to count the number of clouds, birds or sheep. The tractor rescues the old farmer's car, stuck in the mud, while villagers walk their dogs and a blackbird watches on a telegraph wire. Steggall chooses a single page to show a relatively small tractor working its way about a field of seeds, which dominates the page under a cloudless sky complete with a golden sun. The next page gives three snapshots of the crop growing, echoed by the letters of the text, which become larger. In the following pages, the machines dominate with the introduction of a harvester, a truck to take the grain to mill and the baler. The cut crop is imaginatively given texture with the use of individual small strips of straw-coloured paper, the fixing of which must be onerous but is effective. The tractor rests over winter in the warm shed and is personified 'sleeping' until the whole cycle begins one more.

Steggall describes the activities clearly with a hint of rhyme, although at first this can be misleading because as the account continues verse is abandoned. We notice the use of alliteration – 'Until the summer soil is scorching' – a scene also evoked by a vivid blue sky and golden fields. She also likes to make use of repetition; e.g. 'And the rain comes down, down and down ... And still the rain comes down', with the rain spots clearly visible alongside three windswept trees, so we see the forces of nature at work alongside man making use of the power of machinery.

A two year old might find the book dull as there is no interactive element to it, no flaps, no textures to feel. Nor is there a clear rhyme, something that many young readers thoroughly appreciate, although it might have been written differently: 'The winter soil is sleeping, when the tractor comes along, pulling its plough through the cold, hard ground'. But the next page does rhyme: 'And the birds fly down, to see what can be found/ by following the tractor/ around and around', which I found a little frustrating.

Congratulations to this talented illustrator, who set up her own Windsock Press in July 2016 and publishes a range of greeting cards, including images from this book. As well as being qualified as a graphic designer, she has been a primary school teacher and now runs workshops, so there are opportunities for pupils, not only to enjoy her brightly coloured book, but to learn how to produce their own books, using some of her collage skills. What fun!

Susan Bailes





Bijan and Manije

Ali Seidabadi, illus. Marjan Vafaian, trans. Azita Rassi, London: Tiny Owl Books, hb. 978 1 9103 2814 9, 2016, £12.99, 24pp. First published in Iran in 2016 by Chekkeh Publishers. [Picture storybook, 5–10 years. Keywords: ancient epic; Persia; kings; Iran; adventure.]

This book depicts one of the ancient Persian epics of Shahnameh (Book of Kings) and brings it to life with such energy and vigour that it’s hard not to be carried along by its vibrant illustrations and its enthralling tale of the two main protagonists, Bijan and Manije.



Copyright © 2016 Karjan Vafaian.

Manije is the daughter of the King of Turan, King Afrasaib, who rules his kingdom with a fist of iron. By contrast, the king of neighbouring Iran, King Khosrow, is kind and loved by his people. Bijan is a young man who serves at the court of King Khosrow and is keen to show himself to be a man of strength, courage and loyalty to his monarch.

An opportunity presents itself when Bijan hears of a herd of wild boar wreaking havoc in the forests on the border with Turan. Boldly, he steps forward and offers to rid the forest of the beasts in the name of his favoured King Khosrow.

So begins an epic adventure for Bijan, across wild terrain and, unexpectedly, into the arms of beautiful Princess Manije, the feisty young daughter of King Afrasaib. Following the narrative arc of all good traditional stories, the young lovers’ journey to true

happiness is blighted by various obstacles along the way, until ancient scores are settled and their union is finally approved by the kings of both nations.

Marjan Vafaian's striking illustrations bring this story to life and provide the perfect accompaniment to Ali Seidabadi's retelling of this traditional story. An exciting literary page-turner for all readers, young and old alike.

Sarah Stokes

Free the Lines

Clayton Junior, London: The Old Brewery, hb. 978 1 7849 3626 6, 2016, £11.99, 32pp. [Wordless picture book, 4–8 years. Keywords: cat; sailing; storm; danger; environment; fishing rights.]

This wordless picture book, using no more than three colours – blue, white and black – on any given page, invites the reader to tell a new story each time it is picked up and opened.

A small cat embarks on his sailing boat for a spot of fishing, with the first two double-page spreads indicating a calm sea and an air of relaxation. All is as it should be. However, things soon change with the onset of a violent storm and a period of turbulence, as we track the cat in his boat, struggling to remain afloat amid tempestuous waves and incessant rain. Night comes and the sea calms as we continue to travel across the pages with the seemingly steadfast cat.

The cat next encounters a huge shipping vessel, with its solid bulk impressively conveyed against the fragility of the cat's little fishing boat. Further problems ensue with deep-sea fishing threatening the ecosystem below the water's surface that the cat must strive to protect, even if only for his own fishing requirements.

This is a delightful book that warrants many revisits between child and adult readers, with plenty of opportunity for discussions centred around either worldwide ecological issues or the trials and tribulations of a cat who just wants fish for his supper.

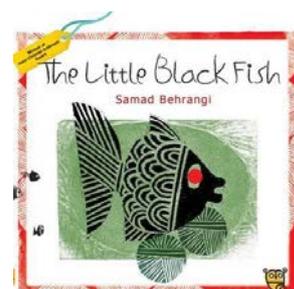
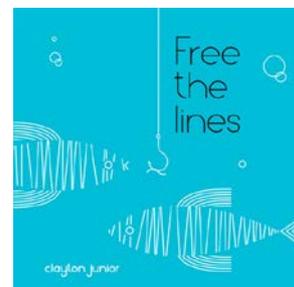
Sarah Stokes

The Little Black Fish

Samad Behrangi, Illus. Farshid Mesghali, trans. Azita Rassi, London: Tiny Owl, hb. 978 1 9103 2800 2, 2016, £12.99, 44pp. [Original work published in Persian in 1968 by Kanoun Parvaresh Fekri, Tehran, Iran; illus. copyright Nazar Publisher.] [Picture book, 4–8 years. Keywords: folktale; fish; adult–child relationship; Iran.]

The Little Black Fish (Mâhî-yi Siyâh-i Kûçûlû) tells the tale of a little black fish who wants to explore what is beyond his stream, but his mother and the other fish underestimate this 'silly child's dreams'. Being different makes the little black fish a 'stranger' in his homeland and in the places he visits. However, following his 'own ideas' opens him to a sea of opportunities. The story presents the power relations between the child and adult; the weak and strong. It is a thought-provoking and engrossing tale told by grandmother fish to her 12000 grandchildren, opening doors for its young readers – especially from the age of seven – to wonder about.

The story has been enriched with beautiful and wonderful illustrations by Farshid Mesghali, who won the Hans Christian Andersen award for illustration in 1974. Considering the violence expressed against different ethnic groups within societies in the wider world, the message of this book is important for the peaceful coexistence of today's diverse world as it not only encourages autonomy and chasing dreams, but also respect and tolerance for others. That was why the book was banned in pre-revolutionary Iran.





Copyright © 1968 Farshid Mesghali and Nazar Publisher.

Samad Behrangi was an Azeri teacher born in Tabriz who taught in different villages across the Azeri region of Iran. He collected folk tales and wrote tales for children in Azeri Turkish and Persian. Because publishing in Azeri Turkish was banned in Iran, he published his books in Persian (Ertan, 2011). He was known as an opponent of the Shah's regime (Hanson, 1983; Fischer, 1990). He was a kind of little black fish. At the age of 29 years his lifeless body was found next to the Aras River. As well as *The Little Black Fish*, his other tale about the bravery of children *One Peach and a Thousand Peaches* (*Yek Holû Hezâr Holû*) is loved by children in Turkey.

Azita Rassi's successful translation has been shortlisted for the Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation. Tiny Owl aims 'to introduce the cream of the crop of global children's literature' and they seem on the way to achieving this goal, starting with beautifully illustrated Persian children's books.

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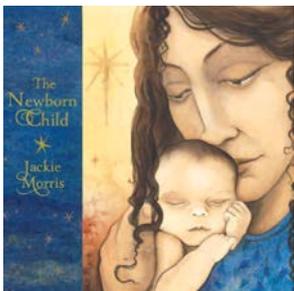
Osman Coban is a PhD student at the University of Glasgow.

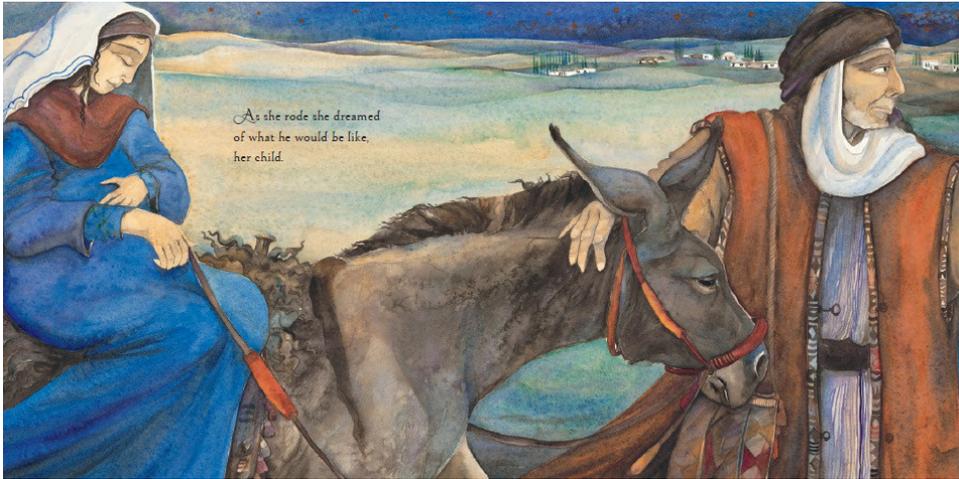
The Newborn Child

Jackie Morris, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, hb. 978 1 9109 5945 9, 2016, £12.99, 40pp. [Picture storybook, 4–8 years. Keyword: birth; the Nativity; mother–child relationship.]

This is a stunning piece of literature for readers of all ages. It tells the story of Mary and Joseph as they discover their fate and begin their journey to Bethlehem in preparation for the birth of Jesus.

Morris's pen-and-ink illustrations provide a superb balance between text and image as each page is turned, and frame the narrative with exquisitely refined details. Tiny flowers bloom as Jesus is born, minuscule insects scurry across the pages, and sumptuous borders in rich, opulent tones provide the reader with a window through which to view the events as they unfold.





Copyright © 2016 Jackie Morris.

This book's real strength, however, is its portrayal, through a deeply moving central narrative thread of a mother snatching precious moments with her newborn baby. He may well be the Son of God, but he is also a tiny child, who needs his mother's love, security, joy and protection before he embarks on his own journey of responsibility. Morris conveys this relationship perfectly through her sparse, lyrical text and through the richness of her images.

I defy any reader not to be moved by this retelling of the Christmas story, which will demand many rereadings in order for its beauty to be revisited and fully appreciated.

Sarah Stokes

Dear Bunny

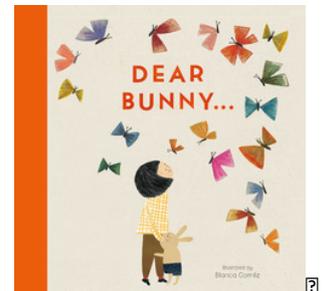
Katie Cotton, illus. Blanca Gomez, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0764 9, 2015, £9.99, 24pp. [Picture book, 5–6 years. Keywords: early readers; toy bunny; rabbit; friendship; kindness.]

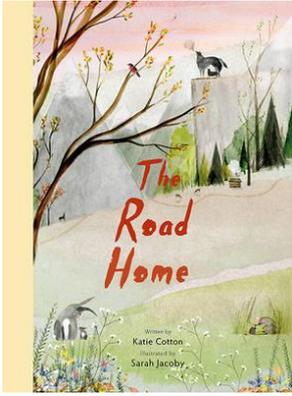
This charming, attractively presented hardback has an orange cloth spine with gold foil imprint of the title, along with gold carefully picked out in the butterflies circling a little girl and her toy bunny, illustrated on the front cover. Throughout the collage, images are flat and much is made of pattern – whether it be stars, leaves, birds, butterflies or tiles. The girl has a dark pageboy haircut and a rosy complexion, whilst the rabbit wears only shorts and is considerably smaller than her. The orange of the end papers matches the spine. In the lower section of the front end papers we see a series of bunny movements as he undertakes a cartwheel. The back end papers show the same bunny tossing and wrapping himself up in his delightful carrot-decorated quilt. 'Dear Bunny' is the letter a small girl writes in response to her bunny's question, 'What's your favourite thing in the world?' Cotton cleverly gives the child's viewpoint and shows how everyday small actions, such as the bunny cooling down her porridge, or holding her hand when she feels scared visiting the zoo, can be memorable.

Above all, bunny is a treasured companion and she is grateful for all she has, especially his friendship and kindness. In a gentle way, we learn to be grateful for our loved ones. The final page shows her hugging him in her arms.

This is an ideal picture book for reading to young children of 3–4 at bedtime and could be read independently by 5–6 year olds.

Susan Bailes





The Road Home

Katie Cotton, illus. Sarah Jacoby, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0803 5, 2015, £10.99, 32pp. [Picture book, 4–8 years. Keywords; verse; survival; birds; climate; weather; mice; wolves; rabbits; parents; children.]

This picture book combines a poem about survival by Katie Cotton with memorable, atmospheric, watercolour illustrations by Sarah Jacoby.

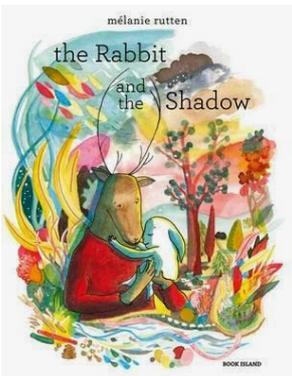
It begins with a mother bird instructing her child to 'Fly with me to far away, where sun still warms the ground' as the climate harshens and a safe, warm home is a long journey away. A refrain emerges: 'This road is hard, this road is long, this road that leads us home.'

The next imperative is given by a mother mouse to her tiny child to help build a nest in which they can shelter during the cold winter months.

This survival tale then moves to a wolf 'Hunt with me' and the falling leaves are replaced by the wolves silhouetted against a vast snowy landscape. Children will understand that the rabbits are vulnerable as they seek shelter from the barbed thorns and fear the predatory wolves. They take refuge among the leaves deep down at night where they can sleep and curl up close. The dark night sky contrasts with the following early morning sunlight as a new day begins. The verse reminds us that 'we are not alone, For you are here, and I'm with you, and so this road is home.' The culmination of the illustrations includes all the sets of animals celebrating the beauty of nature. I found the poetry a little strained and demanding for a young child —'For hunger is a burning thing, that settles like a stone', to take one example – but the illustrations overcome any difficulty and the parent–child bond is reinforced effectively.

[For two inside illustrations, see www.jennifer-bell-author.com/single-post/2016/09/04/SUNDAY-BEST-CHILDRENS-BOOK-OF-THE-WEEK-The-Road-Home-by-Katie-Cotton-illustrated-by-Sarah-Jacoby.]

Susan Bailes



The Rabbit and the Shadow

Mélanie Rutten, trans. Sarah Ardizzone, Book Island: Raumati South, New Zealand, hb. 978 0 9941 0980 4, 2014, £14.99, 56pp. Distributed in the UK by Thames & Hudson. Available on Amazon UK. [Picture storybook, 5–10 years. Keywords: growing up; parenthood–childhood; anthropomorphic animals.]

The Rabbit and the Shadow, written and illustrated by Melanie Rutten and translated by Sarah Ardizzone, is an allegorical story about the adventurous experience of growing up. In this picture book, the relationship of parenthood and childhood is beautifully woven as a process of continual change and learning. The story opens by introducing the main characters – an eclectic group consisting of a rabbit, a stag, a soldier, a cat, a book and a shadow. As these characters' paths serendipitously cross, battles are fought and fears conquered as events gently unfold.

Through Rutten's illustrations the pace of the narrative artfully varies as the eye is led over the pages, sometimes in small vignettes, sometimes fabulously taking up whole or double spreads of rich, bright watercolour. Paint is energetically placed in decorative marks, splashes and brush strokes amongst gentle colour washes that dreamily infuse into one another. Readers of all ages will be delighted by the colour palette, which is mainly composed of crimson, blue, green and yellow – achieving a stained-glass clarity that illuminates the lands and forest of the story that the characters inhabit.



At a bend in the path,
a whole world opened up.
The volcano rumbled in the distance.

A whole world opened up. The volcano rumbled in the distance. Copyright © 2014 Mélanie Rutten.

As a shadow watches over them, the characters learn that doubts and fears can be overcome with friends that understand and accept each other as they gradually become as important as family. Every revisit to this picture book will bring to the reader's mind alternative interpretations of the story as Rutten sensitively allows the reader to reflect on their own thoughts and feelings through the characters' journeys. Ultimately, this beautiful picture book reminds us that even guardians sometimes need a guide to be freely courageous.

Katie Forrester is a PhD candidate at Edinburgh University.

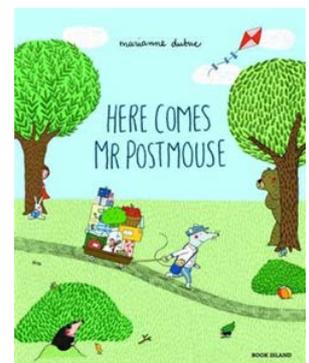
Here Comes Mr Postmouse

Marianne Dubuc, trans. Greet Pauwelijn, Bristol: Book Island, hb. 978 0 9941 2820 1, 2016, £10.99, 32pp. First published in French by Casterman, Brussels as *La Tournée de Facteur Souris*. [Picture book, ages 3–6. Keywords: postman; journey; households; anthropomorphic animals; rural community; translation; interactive.]

Book Island is a former New Zealand-based publishing house, now based in Bristol UK, striving to bring stories from Europe into the English- and Dutch-language market. *Here Comes Mr Postmouse* extends their range by translating from Canadian French this persistently exciting children's picture book by the award-winning Canadian author and illustrator Marianne Dubuc.

Adults and children know the delight of walking with their fingers along maps, or moving counters across a snakes-and-ladders board. All of them will recognise the immediate appeal of the book. The front cover sets the scene for the whole book as we watch a smiling Mr Postmouse with his confident, whiskered nose high in the air as he purposefully tugs his trolley laden with wondrous letters and parcels along the path. To whom will he deliver? Not just to Mr Bear's house, from whom he keeps his distance by delivering to an outside box, but also, follow with your finger over the page to Mr Rabbit's house. Now, here's where it gets really exciting. Here you can follow with your finger down the ladder into the warren where the Rabbit family have their dining room. I'm not saying Mr Postmouse went there. But the reader can. Nor does Mr Postmouse venture inside the venomous Señor Snake's extended sunhouse. Who would want to?

This is a carefully and exquisitely illustrated set of journeys for Mr Postmouse. Marianne Dubuc's great skill as an illustrator is to combine gripping attention to the



detail of all that is inside every kitchen, whilst at the same time keeping us aware of the big picture of all the journeys taken by Mr Postmouse. You can climb ladders into treehouses; work out where the pulleys will take Mr Squirrel's nuts; and take lunch with Mr Dragon who grills sausages with his fiery breath. Be careful! By the time we reach the Ant family there is a vast array of possible underground journeys in the ants' nest. We are taken under the sea for Mr Octopus, into the ice house for Mrs Penguin and deep, indeed, into the Hen house.

Perhaps the print of the short sentences on each page is rather small for younger readers for whom this book will appeal. But that won't matter if you have not yet learned to read. You will be engrossed in following these stories to wherever they lead and are probably content to have parents or grandparents read the words to you.

Margaret Strain, with a little help from husband John.

Information Books and Non-Fiction

Little People, Big Dreams: Frida Kahlo

Maria Isabel Sánchez Vergara, illus. Gee Fan Eng, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0771 7, 2016, £9.99, 32pp. [First published in Spain by Alba Editorial, Barcelona, 2014.] [Information book, 4+ years after initially with an adult. Keywords: painter; Mexico; biography; tragedy; illustrated.]

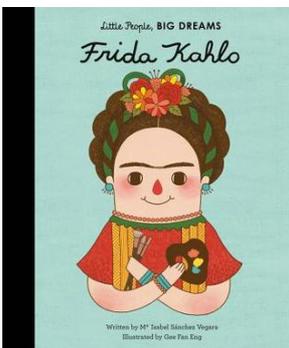
This book is a part of a series called Little People, Big Dreams, describing the lives of outstanding people, from designers and artists to scientists. See below for the review of another book in the series: *Coco Chanel*.

This is an illustrated biography about the life of an exceptional artist and inspiring woman: twentieth-century Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. Kahlo had a difficult life and the book's text narrates it with basic vocabulary and syntax in a realistic but positive way. Parents need to know that this is not a bedtime story. After a biographic narration, the book closes with a useful timeline of Kahlo's life including photographs of the artist. The English text in this edition lacks the strength of the Spanish original, which is written in rhymed verse.

The storyline describes basic facts about Kahlo's life conveying important traits of her inspiring personality. The biography portrays the story of self-improvement, resilience and perseverance of a singular woman. The narration closes stressing Kahlo's love for life despite her hardships and struggles. Significantly, the last illustration of a painting that appears in the book, shows Kahlo's positive message to the world as she expressed it in her remarkable painting: *Viva la Vida*, also titled *Death Nature: Viva la Vida*. Adapting to each particular child, educators can decide whether or not to explore the complexities of Kahlo's vision of the duality between life and death.

The book is beautifully illustrated in vibrant colours that mirror a joyful Mexican aesthetic. The peculiarity of the book's illustrations together with a few words written in Spanish (in an ambulance, on a bus, on the painting *Viva la Vida*) successfully convey the singularity of a Mexican setting, where Kahlo grew up. The colourful illustrations and attractive page layout will be captivating for young children. Teachers, librarians and parents will ideally support the reading of this book with additional material containing original reproductions of Kahlo's paintings. At the end of the book the reader can find a few references of other books. Art books and online resources about Kahlo are easily available and will help young children appreciate the strength and artistic originality of the works of this outstanding painter.

Nina Alonso is a PhD student at the University of Cambridge, Vice President of 'Les Mots de Zaza' and an external advisor of 'Il était une fois'.



Little People, Big Dreams: Coco Chanel

This book is one of a pair in the series *Little People, Big Dreams* (*Frida Kahlo* is the other one). There are some quite difficult/unusual aspects to these women's lives and initially it would be an advantage for an adult reader to share the book with the child so that events/experiences could be thought about and discussed.

Isabel Sanchez Vegara, illus. Ana Albero, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0771 7, 2016, £9.99, 32pp. [Picture book: non-fiction. 4+ years. Keywords: biography; successful women; dreams; fashion.]

This book narrates the story of Coco Chanel, the famous fashion designer from France. When she was a little child, she was different from the other girls in the orphanage. Instead of dolls and hopscotch, she liked playing with needles and threads. When she grew up, she experienced many difficulties and also changes in various careers before she managed to start her own business. She designed skirts and dresses that were different from the usual style; they were comfortable and easy to wear. With her creativity, Chanel became one of the most successful women and famous style icons that has ever existed. For the curious reader, the back of the book features extra facts about Chanel's life and a timeline accompanied by old photographs of hers.

The illustration complements whimsically the written text. The figure of Coco Chanel is adorned with details of black-and-white parallel lines. These lines are the illustrative trademark that makes her stand out from the other figures which look stylistically very similar. One of the pictures that engaged my attention captures a moment from Chanel's school. The little girl is writing on the blackboard of her school 'To be irreplaceable one must always be different'. The written repetition of this sentence on the blackboard implies that it is a detention. However, the angry face of the nun/teacher in the background, in contrast to the smile on the face of Chanel, shows that the content of the sentence was actually Chanel's idea; she playfully subverted the detention. These are Chanel's true words that highlight the moral of her story: at the end of the day it is great to be different.

Like all the books in the series *Little People, Big Dreams*, this story can inspire and motivate everyone, but especially young children, to follow their dreams no matter the obstacles and the difficulties. There are numerous possible paths to success, and art in various forms can be one of those. Chanel's big dreams started when she was very little. Then she conquered the world and showed that with passion, determination and creativity you can actually make a difference.

Lina Iordanaki is a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge.

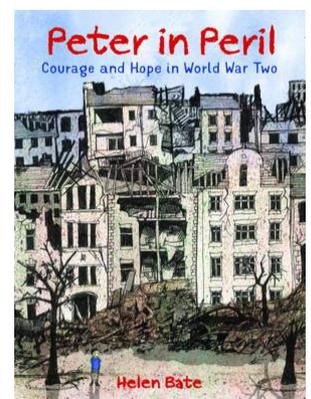


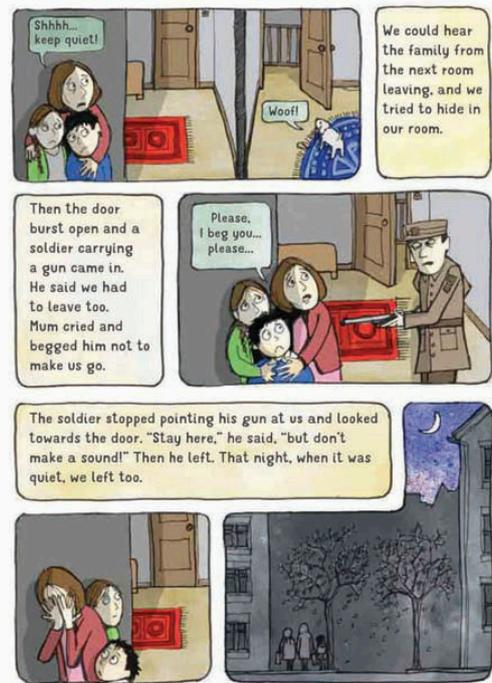
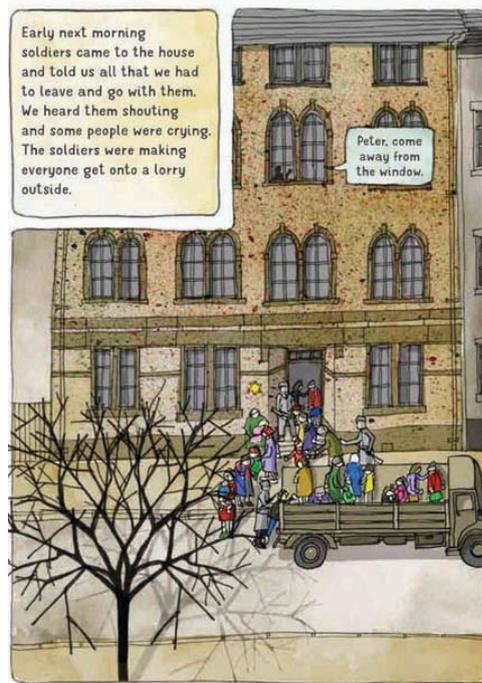
Peter in Peril: Courage and Hope in World War Two

Helen Bate, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, pb. 978 1 9109 5957 2, 2016, £12.99, 48pp. [Picture book, non-fiction, 8–12 years. Keywords: graphic novel; war; Jews; Germany, ghetto; refugees.]

Fearful. Hungry. Threatened. Bored. A few of the tumult of emotions a child endures when war forces him/her to leave his/her childhood home. Echoing Judith Kerr's *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, Peter, a little Jewish boy in World War Two Budapest, must, as Anna in Hitler's Berlin, make the most difficult decision of all, to pack just one toy to accompany him on a terrifying journey. Based on a true story,

Helen Bate, in graphic picture-book form, recaptures the Second World War as seen through a child's eyes. 'But WHY do we have to?' Peter asks when his mother explains how 'all of us Jewish people ha[ve] to wear big yellow stars on our coats'; the ghetto is described simply as 'The Jewish House'.





Copyright © 2016 Helen Bate.

Peter and his family are lucky – they survive, and in their story of survival, Bate celebrates the power of storytelling. When in hiding, Peter’s mother manages to find Peter a picture book that, when read, is ‘like entering a magical world’.

Endorsed by Amnesty International UK, this book, which establishes ‘the right to life and to live in freedom and safety’ could not be more pertinent for the current political climate, not only here in the UK, but also further afield.

With pages at the back of the book describing the background of Peter’s story and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this book is ideal for use with Key Stage 2 and older years to discuss and reflect on the perils of war for children and their families, and how to find hope and courage.

Lucy Stone is a PhD Student in Children’s Literature at Newcastle University.

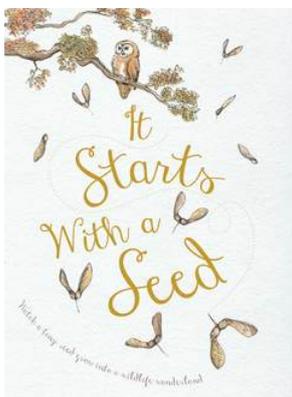
It Starts with a Seed

Laura Knowles, Illus. Jennie Webber, London: words & pictures, hb. 978 1 9102 7717 1, 2016, £11.99, 32pp. [Information book, ages 4–8. Keywords: seed lifecycle; ecology; illustrated; rhyming text.]

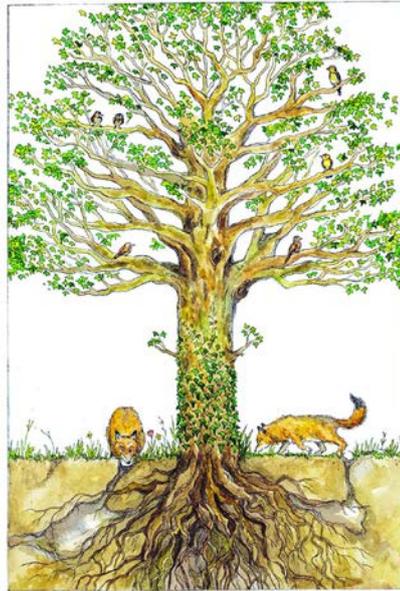
This work of non-fiction shows the lifecycle of a tiny seed that, over the months and seasons and years, transforms into a large tree. From a tiny seedling to a sapling to a shrub to a young tree, the first year of the seed is a time of rapid changes.

There are many changes to the surrounding environment too. Soon many winged and burrowing creatures come and take shelter in and around the young tree. Over the next few years the tree flourishes and grows ‘into a wildlife wonderland’.

Through the medium of a beautifully made picture book, the author depicts the lifecycle of a seed. The hardback cover is textured white and gold, with gold endpapers. The illustrations appear to be made in watercolour on thick paper and have an old-worldly charm, often reminding me of those in Beatrix Potter’s Peter Rabbit books.



All busily making
a life of their own,
in their leaf-laden,
bark-bound arboreal home.



Copyright © 2016 Jeannie Webber.

There is a sense of calm space – often there is a small illustration on the recto with a small line to accompany it on the verso. The big cream expanse of the page around it serves to heighten the impression of the small size of the seed and of the sapling.

The climax and the ‘wow’ moment comes when the fold-out flap opens up at the end of the book, bringing the seed’s life to a full circle. This is a book that feels like a special experience, whether reading out to a young person or reading it on one’s own.

Soumi Dey is a PhD candidate at Glasgow University.

Poetry

Dinosaurs & Dinner-Ladies

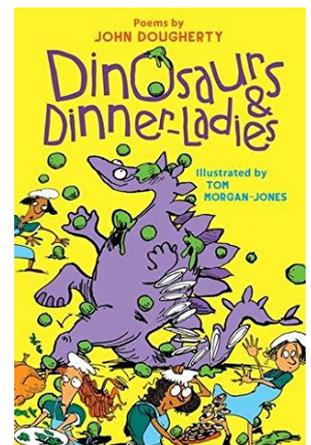
John Dougherty, illus. Tom Morgan-Jones, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, pb. 978 1 9109 5956 5, 2016, £6.99, 95pp. [Poetry, 6–11 years. Keywords: illustrated; animals; school; haiku; humour.]

This is a debut collection of poems by Northern Irish writer John Dougherty, whose first book for children, *Zeus on the Loose* (2004), was shortlisted for the Branford Boase Award. The first poem explains why dinner-ladies have outlived dinosaurs, while the last is a gentle lullaby, and in between there are limericks, haiku and cautionary verse. There is also the gender issue of wearing pink and a child’s affectionate memories of his Auntie Fred in this entertaining, and often thoughtful, poetic excursion.

One of my favourites is the cautionary ‘Note to an English Teacher’ (Dougherty was a primary-school teacher until 2004) about the dangers of dissecting a poem because when you put it back together it doesn’t seem to work as well as it did. Time enough, it suggests, for some serious deconstruction when the young poetry reader is a bit older.

The Alliterative Alligator, ‘who lurks languidly, looking like a lazy dog’, is entertaining and educational, and that Dougherty also performs in schools and at book festivals is evident, for many of his poems, like this one, are perfect to read aloud.

In a contrast of mood, ‘The Handicap’ is a sensitive observation of two people animatedly conversing in sign language on a noisy, rattling tube train while the other passengers ‘sit in solitude, all alone together’ because they are unable to make themselves heard. I love Dougherty’s use of alliteration: ‘Fingers flickering like firelight/



Palms flashing like silvered signals'. With 'carefree words' they create their own rhythm, their own space in the rattling train carriage.

Dougherty's inventive use of language, and with each poem different enough to keep a young reader interested, there is plenty here to capture a child's imagination. And Tom Morgan-Jones's cartoon-like illustrations are fun too.

June Hopper Swain

Adder, Bluebell, Lobster: Wild Poems

Chrissie Gittins, illus. Paul Bommer, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, pb. 978 1 9109 5955 8, 2016, £6.99, 96pp. [Poetry, 7+ years. Keywords: Illustrated; humour; animals; birds; plants; fish; wordplay.]

Another lively poetry book in Janetta Otter-Barry's series, now published by her own imprint. These books are produced in attractive full-colour covers with text and illustrations on recycled paper, the illustrations in greyscale. The book is the right size to be pushed into a satchel or rucksack and to be pulled out on the bus, car or train.

The subtitle 'Wild Poems' indicates the contents, which relate to the 40 poems on animals, birds and plants. These are positioned alphabetically, starting at Adder and finishing at Wren. A departure from its forerunners in the series, the author has written an introduction.

In 2008, Lisa Saunders discovered that over 100 words naming natural objects such as blackberry, lark, buttercup and wren had been removed from the Oxford Junior Dictionary. The author states that she wanted to recapture some of these words and help restore their value and so has chosen 40 as titles for her poems in this book. Her other aim is to encourage her readers to write their own poems and use that as a good excuse to go out adventuring in parks, woodlands and river banks.

'Adder' starts the book with a swing and a pun, and opposite the text the illustration shows two intertwined adders dancing. Here is the first verse.

If you add an adder to an adder
they are prone to have a dance,
they writhe around each other
till the strongest gets a chance
to PUSH the other down.

'Allotment' is set out on a double spread to show the rows of plantings with gaps between. Two birds hover. Here are the first two lines.

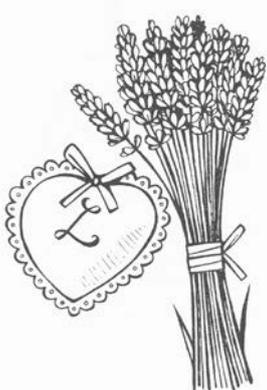
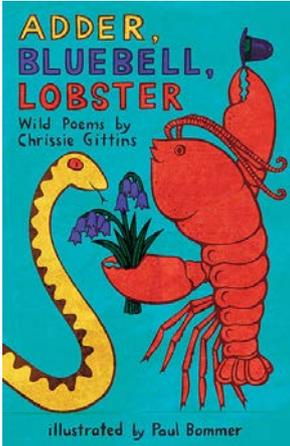
When it rains the soil sighs deeply,
The leaves of the purple sprouting broccoli giggle as the rivulets tickle their veins,

'Dandelion' starts 'I have a clock which doesn't tick ... I have a head which says 'Blow me'. A footnote gives the derivation of the plant's name.

'Lavender' has each line starting with a letter of the name:

Lie in your bath and inhale the exquisite scent.
...
Even used on battlefields of World Wars One and Two
to prevent infection and relieve pain'.

Melons have a party, mint is enjoyed in mint chocolate ice cream, otters enjoy their habitat quietly, plaice lie on the sea floor spying, the raven is certainly calling loudly as illustrated in its poem and willow is illustrating a plate. What a wonderful, imaginative collection! Such variety, and capturing the spirit of each plant, animal and bird. The author cleverly relates our knowledge of each, such as rhubarb in a crumble and lavender oil to ward off mosquitoes.



The age range is stated as 7+. I definitely agree with the plus as I have enjoyed all these poems. This is an exceptional collection for all ages from the very youngest baby and preschool child to those at secondary school. The illustrations are lively and well match the poems.

Jennifer Harding

The next issue of *IBBYLink* is *IBBYLink 49*, Summer 2017 (copydate 31 March 2017), and will be on 'writing the past'.

Articles on other subjects are also welcomed. Contributions to Ferelith Hordon: fhordon@aol.com.

If you are interested in becoming a reviewer for *IBBYLink*, contact Judith Philo: jphilo@waitrose.com. New reviewers are always welcome.

Titles for Review

Publishers and others with books to be reviewed in *IBBYLink* should send them to Judith Philo at 194 Tufnell Park Road, London N7 0EE; jphilo@waitrose.com.

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