

The Little Black Hen

- Written by Antony Pogorelsky
- Retold by Elizabeth James
- Illustrated by Gennady Spirin
- Simply Read Books £11.95
- ISBN: 1 894965 0 35

This haunting tale, written in 1829, is packed with wonder from first page to last. It tells of how young Alyosha discovers another miniature world co-existing in his own house. This find is made courtesy of his pet black hen who, in his other human incarnation is ambassador to the miniature folk living underneath the floorboards. Alyosha is granted his dearest wish, but only on condition he never gives away the secret. But of course he does, with sad consequences for all concerned. Luminously illustrated by the great fellow Russian artist Gennady Spirin, this book offers a genuinely magical experience as boy and hen explore the sort of hidden worlds that can normally only be dreamed about.

Nicholas Tucker

Tigress

- Written by Nick Dowson
- Illustrated by Jane Chapman
- Walker Books £10.99
- ISBN: 0 7445 8619 4



A tigress is out hunting, well camouflaged by the tall grass. Later she decides to move her two cubs to a new hiding place. As the cubs grow their mother teaches them vital skills until they are finally old enough to fend for themselves. This simple story will appeal to children who love animals and want to learn more about them. The language is straightforward and facts are presented in a pleasing story-like way. The bold, double-spread illustrations are eye catching and give the young reader clues as well as pleasure.

Marianne Adey

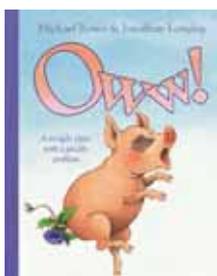
Oww!

- Written by Michael Rosen
- Illustrated by Jonathan Langley
- Harper Collins £9.99
- ISBN: 0 00 712442 2

This prickly story is ideal for children to perform. A piglet wakes up one morning to find a thistle stuck to his tail. His friends try to help. Cat tries

First Steps

to claw it off and prickles her paw. Dog tries to whack it off and prickles his tail. Sheep tries to kick it off but



prickles her foot. Then along comes donkey who just loves thistles - and gobbles it up. All this

happens before breakfast and the pictures are bathed in the first light of the sunrise. The 'feel-good' factor is most stimulating - not only for reading but also for getting up and going out to help a friend!

Mike Maran

Dog Story

- Written by Kathy Henderson
- Illustrated by Brita Granstrom
- Bloomsbury £9.99
- ISBN: 0-7475-5071-9

Jo wants a dog. Her parents are set against the idea. They do allow her a pet mouse but it's no substitute for a dog. The parents hope a kitten will satisfy Jo. It doesn't. Nor does the arrival of a new baby brother. Nothing can assuage Jo's longing for a dog. This is subject matter that has been covered several times before in picture books but never as freshly and entertainingly as here. The text slips effortlessly into rhythm and rhyme, particularly when emphasising the parents' wearily repeated refusals

*Her parents sighed,
shook their heads from side to side.*

The book's designer, Sarah Hodder, has done a superb job of matching text to Brita Granstrom's illustrations, curving the words at moments of lively action. All is resolved - to Jo's satisfaction and her parents' gobs-macked exhaustion - when Grandma arrives out of the blue with a puppy in a box.

Michael Thorn

Hopping Mad!

- Written by Michael Catchpole
- Illustrated by David Roberts
- Little Tiger Press £9.99
- ISBN: 1 84530 867 X

Young Fred and Finn live next door to each other, but they are rivals rather than friends. Each possesses five frogs, but inevitably there is some crossing over at night, leading to jealousy next day when the numbers are no longer equal. The boys' desperate attempts to



keep each quota of frogs entirely equal ends up by driving them all away to a much friendlier environ-

ment. Quite a morality tale, but one made user-friendly throughout by David Roberts' illustrations. His genial frogs seem to be wearing miniature headlights and always have loads of fun once the stupid young humans have got out of the way.

Nicholas Tucker

And The Good Brown Earth

- Written & illustrated by Kathy Henderson
- Walker Books £10.99
- ISBN: 0 7445 8141 9

This inviting book introduces children to the gardening year through the relationship between Charlie and his Nan. They regularly visit the vegetable plot together; it may be time to dig and sow; or time to weed or water; time to watch and wait; and finally, time to gather in the harvest. Each beautifully detailed picture is merged with text that reflects Charlie's experience of growing things for the first time. He may not understand the process but his wonder and excitement bursts through as he discovers the magic of nature (and reading) all around in the rhythmic language and the recurring phrase 'And the good brown earth got on with doing what the good brown earth does best.'

Phyllis Gaunt

The Princess Knight

- Written by Cornelia Funke
- Illustrated by Kerstin Meyer
- The Chicken House £10.99
- ISBN: 1 904442 01 3

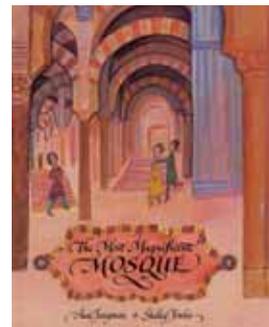
Princess Violetta is mocked by her three older brothers about her inability to ride, fight and joust. But by practising hard and in secret she eventually becomes their equal. On one unhappy day her father decides to marry her off to whoever can win her hand at a special tournament to be held on her birthday. But Violetta has other plans, as readers can find out for themselves from this jolly story, illustrated cartoon style throughout with never a dull moment.

Nicholas Tucker

The Most Magnificent Mosque

- Written by Ann Jungman
- Illustrated by Shelley Fowles
- Frances Lincoln £10.99
- ISBN: 1-84507-012-7

This historical story is highly relevant today.



It tells the story of The Great Mosque in Cordoba, famous for its beautiful architecture and fragrant gardens. Three boys, Rashid a Muslim, Samuel a Jew and Miguel a Christian, all play together in the garden and throw ripe oranges at people coming out of the Mosque. When they are caught their punishment is to work in the gardens for three months. The delightfully atmospheric illustrations catch the youthful exuberance and retribution that follows. Years later when a Christian king wanted to destroy the building the three old friends came together with their communities to save the mosque for future generations.

The message that all faiths can join together in the appreciation of grandeur and tranquillity, despite religious and cultural differences, is beautifully and simply expressed.

Phyllis Gaunt