

Reviews Picture Books for everyone



Howling at the Moon

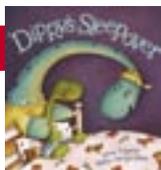
Written by Michael Catchpole
Illustrated by Jill Newton
Gullane Pinwheel £10.99
ISBN: 978-1862335752

The gorgeous rich colours and expansive illustrations draw readers immediately to this atmospheric picture book. Beautifully laid out, the generous text is discreetly placed and the story has an easy flow. In the forest the young animals are startled by a strange howling coming from the top of the hill. Their parents tell them it is a hungry wolf and warn them not to go near, although they have never actually seen it for themselves! A curious little mouse finds out that this is far from the truth and, to the others' surprise, returns with a new friend. It's a charming, accessible tale with a gentle moral and the instantly familiar animals are very expressive and their closeness enables children sharing the book to feel very much part of the action. The soft, slightly blurred effect and predominance of dark blues, greens and browns enhances the night time atmosphere and suspense.

Sarah Hill

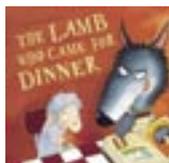
Dippy's Sleep over

Written by Jane Clarke
Illustrated by Mary McQuillan
Red Fox £5.99
ISBN: 978-0099451396



This book tackles the delicate problem that arises when a five-year-old who still wets the bed is invited for his first sleep-over. The child here is represented by Dippy, a young dinosaur. He tries so hard to stay dry each night before the great visit, but each night a dream will suddenly turn liquid with inevitable results. But when his friend's mother hears about this, she is quite relaxed since her own son has the same problem. Waterproof sheets come to the rescue, and by the end the two friends find that talking about their situation helps them find a cure, with the next night passing triumphantly dry. Wittily illustrated, this pleasing little story could also be helpful in opening up a problem most small children would rather forget.

Nicholas Tucker



The Lamb Who Came For Dinner

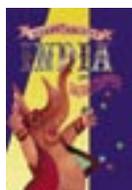
Written by Steve Smallman
Illustrated by Joelle Dreidemy
Little Tiger Press £10.99 ISBN: 978-1845063733

"Vegetable soup AGAIN!" moaned the old wolf. "Oh, I wish I had a little lamb. I could make a hotpot..." Just then, there is a knock on the door. And would you believe it ... it's a little lamb! "Hotpot here I come," thinks the old wolf. But

the lamb is very cold. He can't eat frozen meat, so he puts her beside the fire to thaw out. Her tummy rumbles. He could get indigestion if he ate a lamb with a rumbling tummy, so he gives her a carrot. She eats that so quickly, she gets hiccups. He doesn't want to catch hiccups when he eats her so he has to cure them. And so it goes on until gradually the wolf's relationship with the little lamb changes. Bold and exuberant pictures complement this delightful story of gentleness overcoming potential aggression.

Pat Tate

India the Showstopper



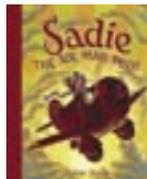
Written and illustrated
by Kerry Argent
Allen & Unwin £10.99
ISBN: 978-1865085960

India is a circus elephant used to enjoying the limelight. But when a new boss makes her do tricks she dislikes, she sabotages the show, so putting herself into deep disgrace. She is duly forgiven and ends on a new high. This Australian picture book may not please those who dislike the whole idea of performing animals. But in truth this fantasy story has nothing to do with grim reality, and it's evident good humour is there for all to enjoy.

Nicholas Tucker

Sadie the Air Mail Pilot

Written and illustrated
by Kellie Strom
David Fickling Books £10.99
ISBN: 978-0385605064



Sadie is an intrepid pilot, which isn't bad considering she's a cat. She flies the little mail plane and today the chief gives her the task of taking the mail to Weatherbird Gusty and Forecaster Fogg at Knuckle Peak Weather Station. On the way she flies into a storm and is instructed to turn back, but she gets through, delivers the mail and brings Fogg's letter to his sweetheart, Julieta, back with her. Though the storm gets worse, Sadie flies on, crashes in the mountains and, stuck in the snow, looks for help. It comes, of course, and Sadie returns, indomitable and triumphant. This is an extraordinarily satisfying book. The text has real depth and resonance; supple prose interspersed with delightful rhyming couplets like little choruses. The illustrations are marvellously inventive, with almost surreal townscapes and landscapes, especially the mountains. The whole is drawn in great detail, even down to a tiny cutaway diagram of Sadie's plane while it is actually in flight. Super.

Dennis Hamley

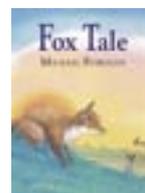
Daft Bat

Written by Jeanne Willis
Illustrated by Tony Ross
Andersen Press £10.99
ISBN: 978-1842704769



Daft Bat gets everything round the wrong way, hence his name. Eventually the accusers realise it is they who've failed to view things from his perspective. 'If it rains very hard the river will rise and my ears will get wet' and 'I would wear a rain hat but it would only fall off into the grass above.' It's these predictions, and more, which convince all the young wild animals that Bat is barmy, and maybe even dangerous. Thankfully they discuss their analysis with Wise Owl who makes a far more thorough examination. This book is all about the common fault of being too ready to make judgements and is astute, humorous and altogether first class.

Gill Roberts



Fox Tale

Written and illustrated by
Michael Foreman
Andersen Press £10.99
ISBN: 978-1842705421

This superb picture book tells the tale of a fox cub new to the world, where: 'the air was so fresh it took my breath away.' He and his two brothers learn that the roaring 'whirlwind bringer', or train, must never be approached, but Father introduces them to the place where it stops. There they enjoy food regularly provided by a kind business man, until one snowy night when he is attacked by young hooligans and they rush to defend him until the ambulance arrives. In a lovely role-reversal, one of the 'man-cubs' returns the next night with food, but 'we didn't go close to him because we had seen he was wild'. The ending is unexpected and deeply satisfying. All the pages combine in a symphony of turquoises, indigos and creamy yellows which envelop both the city's outskirts and the urban fox-cubs in mellow dusks and smudged pastel dawns. Unsentimental, unmissable and absolutely masterly, this must increase Michael Foreman's list of awards.

Tina Massey

Lucia and the Light

Written by Phyllis Root
Illustrated by Mary Grandpre
Candlewick Press £10.99
ISBN: 978-0763622966



This captivating tale was inspired by Nordic folklore. When the sun is stolen Lucia, together with her milk-white cat, sets out to find it. So begins a journey from the warmth of her log cabin to the bitter snowy mountains of the Far North. Mary Grandpre's illustrations perfectly capture the lightness and darkness of the story. At times the pastel colour drawings of Lucia, her family and the animals around the log cabin, look almost as if they have been carved from wood and are sure to appeal to young children. But those grotesque mountain trolls, with their wobbly noses, toothless grimaces and bloodshot eyes, might prove a bit scary for the youngest.

Richard Monte

Ruby Sings the Blues

Written and illustrated by Niki Daly
Frances Lincoln £5.99 ISBN: 978-1845072803



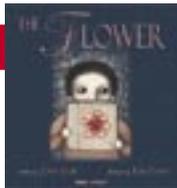
Ruby has the loudest voice of anyone. Her parents and teachers suggest she turns down the volume but she does the opposite; and drives away all her friends. She is feeling lonely until Bernard and

Zelda, the saxophonist and blues singer living in the basement of her house, offer to give her singing lessons. She learns to control her voice and her friends return. The pictures by the South African author/illustrator have the feel of American illustrations of the 1950s but the book itself is timeless.

Enid Stephenson

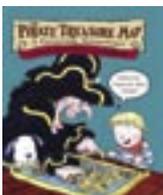
The Flower

Written by John Light
Illustrated by Lisa Evans
Childs Play £9.99
ISBN: 978-1846430718



The illustrations in this minimal-text picture book are very much in the Tim Turner tradition – muted pastel shades of brown and grey, vacant looking expressions on wide, round faces. A distinctly dystopian eeriness fills its hauntingly mesmerising pages. 'Brigg lived in a small room in a big city,' begins the story – and so we follow the resigned drudgery of Brigg's soulless, colourless urban life. One day he steals a forbidden book from the library where he works and learns about flowers – something he has never seen in the barren metropolis he calls home. Then, seeing the same shapes and colours on a packet of seeds in a shop window, he transforms his dreary accommodation by growing a beautiful plant. But Brigg's delight turns to anguish when the plant is sucked away by the automatic cleaning system in his apartment. All is not lost however, as the plant continues to thrive in a dust heap outside the city, and hope for a more colourful future is restored. A simple story with a strong message against apathy, reinforcing the notion that it only takes one person to make a difference.

Rowan Stanfield



Pirate Treasure Map

Written and illustrated by
Colin and Jacqui Hawkins
Walker Books £10.99
ISBN: 978-184428879X

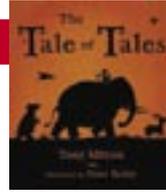
Jack, son of Old Mother Hubbard and of Beanstalk fame, is bored and longs for some action. So when his pirate uncle, Cap'n Horatio Hubbard, turns up with tales of adventure and invites him to set sail with him in search of lost treasure, he has no trouble in leaving his life behind. After narrowly escaping from a mutinous crew, Jack and the Cap'n are rescued by the Owl and the Pussycat, who, in their beautiful pea-green boat, take them to an island. Here, map in hand, they set out on a treasure trail across a landscape peopled with nursery rhyme and fairy tale characters, among them, Hansel and Gretel, Little Boy Blue and the Billy Goats Gruff. Thoroughly entertaining, this is a rollicking story written and illustrated with huge dexterity and

lashings of wit. There's also a pull-out map of the island, the very one that Jack and his uncle refer to, so that the reader can check their progress and the landmarks along the way to the treasure.

Anne Faundez

The Tale of Tales

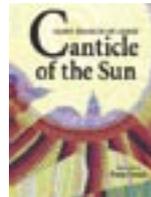
Written by Tony Mitton
Illustrated by Peter Bailey
Picture Corgi £4.99
ISBN: 978-0552548878



This treasure of a book, now in paperback, is flawless in its storytelling, illustration style and design.

Monkey sets off for Volcano Valley to listen to the greatest story ever told. En-route, he is joined by Elephant and then by a succession of other creatures all eager to make the pilgrimage. To pass the time, each tells a story – a folk tale here, a fairy tale there and even the most muddled of stories from timid Worm. Imagine their surprise when, upon reaching their destination, they find the rest of the kingdom already assembled, eagerly awaiting the magical words 'Once upon a time...!' The text is fresh and engaging, and – as to be expected from such an accomplished storyteller – beautifully written. As it alternates between the story proper of Monkey and his friends' journey and the tale each tells, so the writing shifts from prose to verse. This pattern is also reflected in the exquisite black and white artwork that changes from bold silhouettes to delicate line drawings. Wonderful.

Anne Faundez



Canticle of the Sun

Written and illustrated
by Fiona French
Frances Lincoln £10.99
ISBN: 978-1845074852

St Francis of Assisi is the young man who gave up his family wealth to become a monk. He went on to found the Franciscan Order and his life is recounted at the end of this arresting book. His great song of praise, here in a thirteenth century translation, is broken into sections, each breathtakingly illustrated in gold accented colour mosaics from whose patterns the sumptuous creatures emerge as you gaze at them. Inspired by medieval mosaics in Ravenna, the pages celebrate the living land, God and finally, Francis himself, surrounded by the birds he loved so much. The ancient language may prove too complex for some, but modern words are available or children may enjoy code-breaking to create their own versions of the song.

Tina Massey

Seven for a Secret

Written by Laurence Anholt
Illustrated by Jim Coplestone
Frances Lincoln £5.99 ISBN: 978-1845075903

Unable to sleep one night because of the noise in the city where she lives, Ruby writes a note to her grandfather who is far away in the countryside. And so begins a series of letters between the two, in which each relays details of their everyday lives, and expresses their continuing hope that one day they will meet. The increasingly fond letters

are punctuated by the presence of magpies, as Grampa tells Ruby about the birds who keep him awake, and teaches her *The Magpie Song*. It becomes apparent that Grampa's health is deteriorating, then when Ruby sees a single magpie on her balcony (1 for sorrow), we realise that he has died. It is this cleverly implied execution that is so touching. Anholt's skilful writing is complemented by softly energetic illustrations, which provide a subtle exposition of the story beyond the letters themselves. The final, fold-out spread provides a fitting conclusion for this memorable, and ultimately, uplifting tale.

Rowan Stanfield.



Death in a Nut

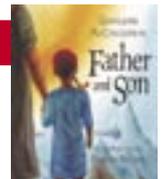
Written by Eric Madder
Illustrated by Paul Hess
Frances Lincoln £5.99
ISBN: 978-1845072773

Jack and his mother lived in a cottage by the sea. One morning Jack found his mother ill in bed saying "I think Old Man Death will be coming for me soon!". Of course, Jack was much upset and went down to the beach where he saw the Grim Reaper coming towards him. Jack fought Death and imprisoned him in a hollowed-out nut. On his return to the cottage he found, to his joy, his mother well and happy. But he then learnt that with Death locked away nothing could die. The hens could not be killed, the vegetables could not be cut – nothing could die anymore. It was then that Jack realised what he had done and that, hard as it is, we need death in order to survive. This is a stunning picture book explaining, as it does, the necessity of death. Not an easy message but it would be hard to think of a better way to explain death to young children.

Enid Stephenson

Father and Son

Written by Geraldine McCaughrean
Illustrated by Fabian Negrin
Hodder £10.99
ISBN: 978-0340882085



The Trinity is one of the most difficult concepts of Christian Theology to grasp. Try explaining to a child of five or six that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are, in fact, all one God. In Geraldine McCaughrean's lyrical interpretation of the birth of Christ, she imagines Joseph alone in the stable – unable to sleep – as he looks on in wonder at 'his' son. And this is where the complications begin and the questions start. If Jesus isn't Joseph's son then whose son is he? But if God is Jesus's father, how can Jesus be God? This is a clever and beautifully told version of the biblical story, which really makes you think. Fabian Negrin's magical, dreamlike illustrations of angels sleeping under the twinkling stars and exotic birds flying through pale coloured skies, are reminiscent in places of Chagall. A truly wonderful picture book which deserves a place as a work of art.

Richard Monte