

Batty

Written and illustrated by Sarah Dyer
Frances Lincoln £6.99 ISBN: 978-1847801593



Adult readers aloud may not always welcome a picture book that frequently demands to be turned upside down. But since the main subject is a long-eared bat who normally sees the world from this position, forgiveness should come quickly. Sarah Dyer writes and illustrates with undeniable style. Set in a zoo, complete with a flea circus – do such things still exist? – Batty tries living the normal way up for a while but is happy to abandon this experiment when he realises that other animals are happy to accept him as he is. All great fun.

Nicholas Tucker

Mole's Sunrise

Written by Jeanne Willis
Illustrated by Sarah Fox-Davies
Walker £11.99
ISBN: 978-1406304749



This is one of those picture books that by its sheer simplicity and directness, and its refusal to be lured towards the siren-rocks of sentimentality, touches the heart and mind in equal measure. Vole invites Mole to see the sunrise, along with Rabbit, Squirrel and Sparrow. The reason why Mole had never witnessed such a thing before is subtly hinted at as the story progresses: Mole feeling the damp mist in his fur, hearing the crackle of leaves, smelling the lake. Vole describing the rising sun, "I can just see the top of its head. It's like the soft yolk of a fried egg," and reminding Mole of the egg he's just had for his breakfast. Squirrel compares the risen sun to a shiny gold button, which prompts Mole to finger the button on his waistcoat. A fable about the transforming effect of the power of friendship and the potency of words, with beautifully controlled, spare writing and soft, muted artwork, this is a memorable, not to say extraordinarily moving, picture book.

Chris Stephenson



Magpie's Treasure

Written and illustrated by Kate Slater
Andersen £10.99
ISBN: 978-1849390088

Magnus Magpie has his life organised to a fine art – ... lazy days! slurping the slimiest worms and chasing pheasants and 'thieving' by night! His extensive stash includes a dancing diva's shimmering shoe, crystal chandeliers, shiny sweets, the brightest of buttons and even His Majesty's most magnificent emerald egg-cup. So successful is he that he becomes ever more greedy and sets

his sights at the ultimate shiny – that is the moon. But is Magnus disappointed? Indeed, will he survive such a journey? And will he ever find his way home safely? This is an enchanting story with truly wonderful illustrations which makes sharing it a fun, magical and memorable experience.

Gill Roberts

Aesop's Fables



Retold by Beverley Naidoo
Illustrated by Piet Grobler
Frances Lincoln £12.99
ISBN: 978-1847800077

Beverley believes that the fables are much more like traditional African stories than European fairy tales and wonders if Aesop, rather than being Greek, was perhaps African and forced to go to Greece as a slave. Whatever the truth his fables have lived for over two and a half thousand years and are still part of our shared culture. This is a stunning retelling with glorious illustrations bringing the fables alive for a new generation.

Enid Stephenson

It's a Book

Written and illustrated by Lane Smith
Macmillan £10.99 ISBN: 978-0230753136

Depending on your view, this is either a manifesto on behalf of print in a digital age or just an amusingly conflicting dialogue between two animal characters. Jackass, armed with a laptop, approaches Monkey who is quietly reading a book. "What do you have there?" asks Jackass. "It's a book," comes the reply. Not good enough for Jackass. He wants to know if you can scroll down on it ... blog ... text ... tweet ... wi-fi ...? To all of which Monkey replies, "No ... it's a book." Jackass's puzzlement grows, while Monkey's repeated affirmation of its being nothing more or less than a book stretches across a whole gamut of emotions from the simply affirmative to the downright exasperated, until something of a *rapprochement* is reached. Bold, uncluttered illustrations and neatly characterised typefaces enhance the to-and-fro nature of the duologue, which is occasionally interrupted by a third character, Mouse (a real one, not a computer attachment). He it is who delivers the final line – provoking controversy in some quarters – "It's a book, Jackass."

Chris Stephenson



Wolf Won't Bite!

Written and illustrated by Emily Gravett
Macmillan £10.99 ISBN: 978-0230704251

The main protagonists of this well-known fairy tale – *The Wolf and the Three Little Pigs* – are given a



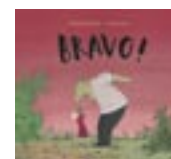
thrilling and meaningful new lease of life in a refreshing retelling with a mesmerizing twist of fortunes. The little pigs come to tame, taunt and tart-up the old villain until he

can tolerate no more. What happens next you will discover with picture story telling seen at its best, where every page comes alive with movement and drama.

Mike Simkin

Bravo!

Written and illustrated by Philip Waechter and Moni Port
Gecko £10.99
ISBN: 978-1877467714



In this story about an anthropomorphised cat family, Helena has what seems the perfect life – a lovely home, her own special talent, a patient brother and a very encouraging mother. Only one thing blights her contentment, and that is her father. Speaking normally isn't for him. No, he is a shouter! This pains Helena so much that she decides to leave home, ignoring that father is shouting as she goes on her way – "You're not going anywhere, do you hear?" Helena's parents miss her dreadfully and father is full of remorse. Weeks pass and father sees a poster with Helena's photograph on and the announcement that she is going to play a concert! The family can't wait to see their beloved Helena again. At the concert the audience is totally silent, enchanted while Helena performs. At the end they applaud wildly but the biggest shout of 'Bravo' comes from her proud father and the family are happily reunited. Accompanied by beautiful illustrations, both words and pictures convey an important message – for parents to listen to their children more.

Heather Blackham

Mum and Dad Glue

Written by Kes Gray
Illustrated by Lee Wildish
Hodder £5.99 ISBN: 978-0340957110



This is a picture book with a simple rhyming story about a boy's search for the glue needed to mend his parents' relationship. As a young boy affected by marriage breakup,

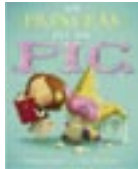
he is naturally wondering if he could be the cause. When he goes to the glue shop and says what he's looking for, the owner takes time to listen to him and explains that whilst the marriage may be broken, his parents still love him. This seems to reassure and he leaves feeling much more positive. While the text carries the message, the pictures contribute significantly to this excellent story. They

focus strongly on the boy and his perspective on the world. The colours are warm but not overpowering, and the layout provides the space that reflects the boy's own need for time to come to terms with his situation. This enables the book to be read slowly, at whatever pace a child chooses to absorb its messages. However, it needs to be used with care, as it is powerful enough to sow doubts in the mind of any child in a secure home. But for the child facing parental breakdown, it could be a lifesaver.

Liz Dubber

The Princess and the Pig

Written by Jonathan Emmett
Illustrated by Poly Bernetene
Macmillan £10.99
ISBN: 978-1405253635



A farmer's piglet and a baby princess are inadvertently exchanged (no, can't tell you how, you'll have to read the book). The princess grows up happy but poor with her new parents; the pig becomes a princess, also happy despite the problems she creates for those around her at the royal court. It has all the ingredients of a sure-fire winner: cute little piglet, baby, princess and a knowing nod at several established fairy tales along the way. The pictures are beautiful, bold; the story is very funny and everyone ends the story happy (except maybe the rather stupid prince who marries the pig in the naive and untested hope that a kiss will turn her back into a princess). What's not to like?

Yvonne Coppard

The Fierce Little Woman and the Wicked Pirate

Written by Joy Cowley Illustrated by Sarah Davis
Gecko £6.99 ISBN: 978-1877467417



Here's something different – a picture book about an adult relationship with no children or talking animal ever in sight! *The Fierce Little Woman*, who looks exactly like Rebekah

Wade of News International fame, lives on her own, knitting socks and occasionally playing the bagpipes for light relief. One night a Wicked Pirate tries to force his way in to her nice little house on the end of a wooden jetty, but is firmly rejected. Only when he humbles himself he finally allowed entry, with the little woman allowing herself the first smile of her life when he proposes marriage and she accepts. Captivatingly illustrated and full of good humour, this really is a picture book to treasure from a talented New Zealand pair who deserves to become much better known over here.

Nicholas Tucker

Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels

Retold by Harriet Castor Illustrated by Fernando Juarez
Carlton £14.99 ISBN: 978-1847325563

Children's versions of Swift's great satire are inevitably abbreviated. In this version, the shorter text is augmented by little booklets, 'documents' such as posters and statements, as well as a



dissolving picture and a pop-up of a giant hand which gives a nice idea of scale. There are illustrated double spreads to outline Gulliver's experiences in each of the countries he visited. We see Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa and Glubbubrib as well as meeting the Yahoos and the noble Houyhnhnms, as in extended versions. The young readers will not find it hard to reach Swiftian conclusions – or they can just read the story for fun. Just like the grown-ups really.

Pat Thomson

The Fairytale Hairdresser

Written by Abbie Longstaff
Illustrated by Lauren Beard
Random House £5.99
ISBN: 978-0552561860



I love books that play with traditional fairy tales and *The Fairytale Hairdresser* is an excellent example. Young readers – with some experience of traditional tales – agreed with me wholeheartedly and enjoyed immensely spotting characters from various fairy tales, as well as loving the story about Kitty Lacey *the best hairdresser in all the land*. Customers of all sorts flock to Kitty's Cuts to have their hair cut and styled by Kitty and there is no problem she cannot fix. One day she is given a most difficult case by a witch whose tower has been taken over by a *river of golden hair*. Whose can it be? As well as a good storyline and a pink and sparkly cover, there is masses of humour and detail in the colorful illustrations – it's sure to be a winner.

Gill MacDonald



The Beasties

Written by Jenny Nimmo
Illustrated by Gwen Millward
Egmont £5.99
ISBN: 978-1405243353

This is a wonderful picture book, full of stars, feathers, shells and pearls, strange creatures and most especially, stories. Daisy has moved to a new house and her bedroom seems very strange and unfamiliar. It looks out across the street and the night-time sounds are mysterious and unknown. So she is not sure what she hears as three strange creatures creep under her bed and hide their treasures. Daisy's fears are soothed as a growly voice begins to tell her a story about a beautiful ring which once belonged to a faraway king, and at the end of the tale she is fast asleep. The following night she lies awake again and this time she hears a clickety voice and the story is about a feather, a ship-wreck and a beautiful bird. On the third night she is entertained by yet another strange voice but on the fourth night Daisy waits in vain and eventually has to be brave and look under the bed where she meets... *The Beasties*... who are not as fearsome as their name sounds. Gwen Millward's illustrations are brightly coloured, rich in detail and character and skilfully complement the stories told to Daisy by the mysterious characters under the

bed. This is a delight for anyone who loves stories or is worried by strange night-time noises!

Louise Stothard

Monkey and Robot: Doctor Monkey

Written by Felix Hayes Illustrated by Hannah Broadway
Bloomsbury £5.99 ISBN: 978-1408806548

Robot and Monkey might be an odd-pair, but they're the best of friends. Monkey thinks it's 'brilliant' when Robot gets a cold because he can be Doctor Monkey. Unfortunately for



Robot, although Doctor Monkey cares, he also thinks he knows best and doesn't allow Robot to do anything – even when he's feeling better. This leads to inevitable frustration and boredom. When Robot falls asleep, things are no longer fun for Monkey. But that's okay – it'll soon be Monkey's turn to be ill. "Aaaachoo!" Bold colours and simple collage techniques share the story's innocence and irrepressible sense of humour. The fun continues after the storytelling with games at the back, including pop-out figures for young readers to use in stories of their own – a nice bit of interactivity without the need for an app or electronic device!

Benjamin Scott



The Romanian Builder

Written by Peter Prendergast
Illustrated by Ross Stewart
O'Brien £7.99
ISBN: 978-1847171054

It has an unusual title, but this spirited picture book is none the worse for that. It tells the story of the growing friendship between young Joe and the builder working in his house who has no English. Gradually they learn to communicate, with Joe joining in the actual building work whenever he can. Stylishly illustrated, always in squares or rectangles, this book is part of the *Bridges* series with the aim of helping children develop their understanding of people from other cultures. It does this very well using both charm and humour.

Nicholas Tucker

On My Way to a Happy Life

Written by Deepak Chopra
Illustrated by Rosemary Woods
Hay House £7.99
ISBN: 978-1401925758



Seven lessons to guide a child into a life of happiness. Sounds very Californian hippy, yeah? And so it is. In places, the text makes you feel almost queasy in its cheery positivity and clichéd philosophy. But the illustrations are lovely, and there is an interesting mix of the central messages of major faiths. I'm not sure that the book can deliver on its claim to *help children to discover the seven 'keys' to living a happy and meaningful life*, especially when there is an optimistic cultural assumption about the starting point for those young lives, but it's an attractive book nonetheless.

Yvonne Coppard