

The Sleeper and the Spindle

Written by Neil Gaiman
 Illustrated by Chris Riddell
 Bloomsbury £12.99
 ISBN: 978-1408859643

Threads and themes of two classic fairy tales weave intricately together in this extraordinary re-telling of Snow White and The Sleeping Beauty. Neil Gaiman's

captivating narrative and Chris Riddell's evocative illustrations offer a new generation of readers a compelling new tale that will challenge expectations and stir hearts. This snow white queen, blessed with insight and knight-like courage, puts her imminent marriage on hold and sets out with her three trusty dwarves to cross the high mountain range separating her kingdom from the adjoining realm that is slowly being engulfed by a sleeping plague. Her task is to reach the castle and waken, with a kiss, the sleeping princess, for only then will dark enchantment be lifted from the land. Skilled storyteller that he is, Neil Gaiman deftly twists the narrative threads at the denouement to make this a tale of three women, each in some way distorted by the other. There is so much to enjoy: lavishly detailed line drawings at each page turn, a translucent dust jacket of briar roses framing a sleeping princess, effective pops of gold, illuminated capitals that, like the unobtrusive page number motifs, chronicle the tale's changing mood.

Catriona Nicholson

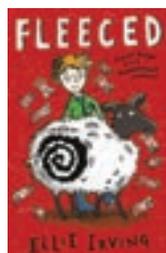
Just William

Written by Richmal Crompton
 Illustrated by Thomas Henry
 Cover illustration by Chris Riddell
 Macmillan £6.99
 ISBN: 978-1447285588



William first appeared in *Home* magazine in 1919. In all, thirty-eight William books were published between 1922 and 1970. Although being written decades ago these stories have stood the test of time and are still popular today. This collection of twelve stories describes the antics of the walking disaster that is William Brown. Often unintentionally, everything he does always leads to chaos and mayhem. Every one of his brilliant ideas somehow goes all wrong. The range of his activities knows no bounds, from adopting stray dogs to babysitting and looking after a shop for a day, even helping his sister's love life – all doomed to failure. It is a wonderful book, very funny and extremely lively. As every page is turned, the reader wonders what else can possibly go wrong. William is a very engaging character, and readers of all ages will be hugely entertained by him – and parents will be hugely relieved that they don't live with him.

Patricia Thompson



Fleeced

Written by Ellie Irving
 Corgi £ 6.99
 ISBN: 978-0552568364

Who ever heard of winning a sheep in a bet? Well, that is exactly what happened to Charlie Rudge, aged ten and three quarters, and his whole life changed as a result. Winning Bertha was only the beginning.

Learning to live on a Scottish farm was a challenge for the whole family, especially when some bumbling crooks showed up looking for his older brother, Jimmy. Charlie finds that he has difficult decisions to make, not only about his sheep but about family relationships. Readers will realise that the title of this novel, *Fleeced*, has several meanings and will enjoy every minute of this comical tale. Hilarious and unputdownable!

Marianne Adey

El Deafo

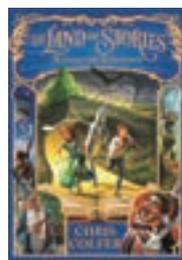
Written and illustrated by Cece Bell
 Amulet £6.99
 ISBN: 978-1419712173

Written in comic book form Cece Bell tells a story of a young girl, here depicted as a rabbit, who contracts meningitis at a young age and as a consequence loses her hearing. The doctors fit a Phonic Ear, a hearing aid with a pouch strapped to her chest, and Cece is thrilled to realise she can hear again although sometimes the words are unrecognisable. Cece now faces growing up in a world where she is laughed at, misunderstood, frustrated and, at times, lonely. She learns to lip read and there are great illustrations of how this can be challenging and even comical. At her new school Cece's teacher has a microphone linked to her Phonic Ear and Cece is delighted with her new super powers. She can hear everything her teacher is saying and doing, not just in the classroom, but also in the staff room, the hall and even the bathroom. This book has humour and pathos and shows how isolated and different deaf children can feel. It is semi-autobiographical and the graphic novel format will enable it to be very accessible.

Ingrid Fox



The Land of Stories: Beyond the Kingdoms



Written by Chris Colfer
 Illustrated by Brandon Dorman
 Little, Brown £12.99
 ISBN: 978-0349124421

This is the fourth book in the series, but the adventure can still be enjoyed by new readers who have not met the characters before by the use of a prologue and some clever dialogue along the way.

Twins Alex and Connor are on the trail of the

Masked Man who is threatening the safety of the Fairy Kingdom they have grown to love. This villain has left the kingdom and is using his magic to open portals into other story lands where he aims to recruit an army of the most unpleasant characters from a variety of other books. The twins, along with their faithful friends Goldilocks, Mother Goose and Red Riding Hood chase him through the Land of Oz, Neverland, Sherwood Forest and Camelot. It's all tremendous fun and the story whizzes along like a rollercoaster. The author clearly has a mind bursting with ideas and this story is not finished yet. There are plenty more adventures ahead for Alex, her brother and their friends from both the real world and from fiction.

Jan Lennon

Illustrated Canterbury Tales

Retold by Sarah Courtauld, Susanna Davidson and Dr Abigail Wheatley
 Illustrated by Maria Surducan and Ian McNee
 Usborne £12.99
 ISBN: 978-1409598312

This retelling of the famous medieval tales concentrates on the colourful characters taking part in the pilgrimage and on some of the better

known stories like *The Knight's Tale* and *The Miller's Tale*. It presents them all in modern colloquial language that is immediately recognisable and will be easily understood by children today. The stories are still full of humour, honour and romance and are just as outrageous and entertaining as they must have been over six hundred years ago. The text is enhanced by the numerous full page colour illustrations that are reminiscent of medieval tapestries and also by the many smaller black and white page decorations. There is an informative introduction that briefly explains Chaucer's world and how the tales came to be written and an equally informative small section at the end which looks at the known facts of Chaucer's life. Very few children will go on to attempt the Middle English original text, but attractive approachable versions like this will ensure that Chaucer's name and his great work will be known for some while yet.



Jan Lennon

Fuzzy Mud



Written by Louis Sachar
Bloomsbury £12.99
ISBN: 978-1408864746

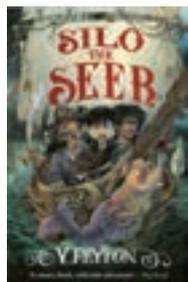
The bold and striking cover is indicative of a book to be investigated. It is a story of friendship and loyalty with an element of science fiction and horror. It also has an underlying message of the impact of science on the environment. The chapters are introduced with a date and time which add to the urgency of the story as it unfolds. Marshall and Tamaya always walk home together for safety reasons and are forbidden to enter the woods. When Marshall is bullied by another classmate their only option is to take a short cut through the woods where Tamaya encounters the 'fuzzy mud'. Chad, the bully, finds them and Tamaya uses the mud to help the two friends escape. The mud reacts badly on all three children, but the result is a saving grace for the town and its inhabitants and Tamaya is a heroine.

Ingrid Fox

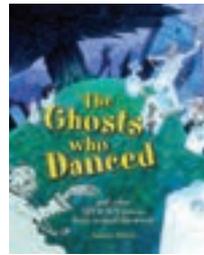
Silo: The Seer

Written by Veronica Peyton
Corgi £6.99
ISBN: 978-0552573535

Silo the Seer is a funny and exciting adventure story set in an indeterminate time in the future. Ten-year-old Silo Zyco knows he is a seer, but probably not a very good one as he doesn't have much luck. He lost his Mum to the 'mudfever', has never known his Dad, known as Aquinus the Accursed, who is wanted for dog theft, and he has inherited the family trait of webbed feet. When the inspectors come from the Capital they recognise that Silo is a seer and take him back with them. Soon Silo is having the time of his life, but not how he expected. This is a wonderful tale; an exciting adventure that will thrill and entertain readers. The characters are believable and sympathetic, with two very strong female leads who work alongside Silo. The schemes to try to defeat the evil government are highly imaginative, not to mention extremely dangerous! The action is non-stop, fully engaging the reader with the predicaments of our heroes. There is subtle humour running throughout the book, which counteracts the darker moments, and there are also some laugh-out-loud moments, especially when Black Tom appears.



Jane Hall



The Ghosts Who Danced

Written by Saviour Pirotta
Illustrated by Paul Hess
Frances Lincoln £14.99
ISBN: 978-1847804358

Subtitled "and other SPOOKY stories from around the world", this is a fabulous compilation of ten riveting retellings from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They reflect the different cultures and also included is added information about each one's specific origin. The stories are all spine-chilling, snappy and sufficiently short to be shared, with plenty of opportunities for different voices and sound effects. All will leave both readers and listeners wanting more. This eerily illustrated large format book is specifically designed for older children who dare.

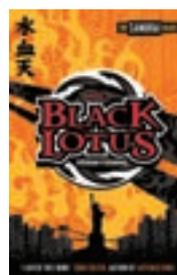
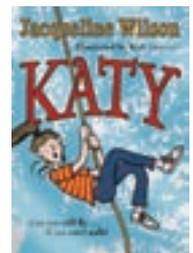
Gill Roberts

Katy

Written by Jacqueline Wilson
Illustrated by Nick Sharratt
Puffin £12.99
ISBN: 978-0141353968

Eleven-year-old Katy Carr, the eldest of six children, is the leader, the tomboy and the one who seems to get into trouble all the time. Her mum died when she was younger and Katy misses her terribly, feeling that no-one understands. Also, she resents the fact that her dad has remarried, finding it difficult to like her stepmother, Izzie. One day, she sneaks into the neighbours' garden and fashions a homemade rope-swing in a tree, but, the rope unravels and she falls to the ground breaking her back. The news that she will never walk again means that Katy has to come to terms with a new, very different life. This modern version of *What Katy Did* captures the family relationships very well and describes how they all re-evaluate those relationships after Katy's accident. The everyday issues faced by people with disabilities are well-drawn and make the reader think, without being laboured. The ending is both positive and hopeful without being unrealistic. As well as being an enjoyable read for Jacqueline Wilson's many fans, this is a thoughtful book that will add to the list of books about disability.

Annie Everall



The Samurai Wars: The Black Lotus

Written by Kieran Fanning
Chicken House £6.99
ISBN: 978-1909489929

A time-travel adventure about three teens with superpowers may seem a well travelled path, but this author rapidly dispels disbelief. Cormac, Ghost and Kate are recruited to a secret ninja group – The Black Lotus. In an alternative history, the present sees Lord Goda's Japanese samurai empire ruling the entire world, but for the USA, which is already facing the enemy at its borders. With powers of invisibility, super speed and animal speech, the teens must go back in time to sixteenth century Japan, then to present day New York, to find the Moon Sword before Lord Goda does, so preventing him from using it to impose his iron rule on all. The three key characters are loyal, quick-thinking and courageous, blending in with peasants in paddy fields, then into the emperor's court. The fast moving, Bond style adventures in exotic locations are enhanced by the super powers, and the final, almost apocalyptic battle for New York, against immense samurai odds, is extremely vivid and convincing. Friendship, team-work, self belief and learning how to think tangentially are vital, while the team also learn who to trust as well as how to forgive.

Tina Massey