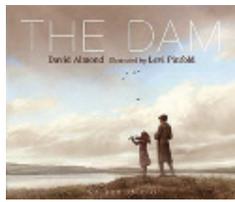


## Titles to engage young readers



### The Dam

Written by David Almond  
Illustrated by Levi Pinfold  
Walker Studio £6.99  
ISBN: 978-1406304879

Kielder Water in Northumberland is the largest artificial lake in the UK.

Just before the dam that will form Kielder Water is completed, Kathryn's father takes her to see what is to be lost. They walk the still and empty valley, looking at the flowers, the animals, the empty houses and remembering the community that lived there, the music that was played, the dances and the parties. Together, they play, sing and dance to fill the silence in the hope that the music will be heard by all, and always remembered by the place itself once the waters closes over it. An extraordinary picture book. David Almond's text is magnificent - every word makes its mark and perfectly captures the sense of poignancy, loss and sadness, yet also celebrates the enduring power of music and the beauty of the new landscape. Levi Pinfold's breathtaking illustrations are a perfect match for the text. His use of colour, light and shade is exceptional and his use of small cameo illustrations combined with sweeping double page landscapes create such a strong sense of place, reflecting the large and the small of community life. A book to pore over and return to again and again.

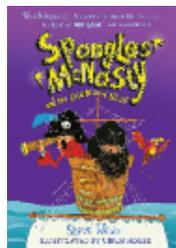
Annie Everall

### Spangles McNasty and the Diamond Skull

Written by Steve Webb Illustrated by Chris Mould  
Andersen £6.99 ISBN: 978-1783446384

Spangles McNasty is a flashy, horrid villain, who eats cold chips from bins and even enjoys making smells in libraries. When the legendary Diamond Skull pirate hat is to be displayed at Bitterly Bay Museum, Spangles, together with his less-than-bright helper, Sausage Face Pete, decides to steal it. But, local boy Freddie Taylor has a plan to fool them. This is real, laugh-out-loud fun, wonderfully brought to life by Chris Mould's lively illustrations. Children will love the silliness and yuckiness of Spangles - how does one chew gum *loudly*? Imaginative, fast-paced and light-hearted, it is also double spaced and frequently illustrated, good to get boys into reading and to re-engage older, reluctant readers. Look out for other stories about the very nasty Spangles McNasty.

Tina Massey



### Spynosaur: No More Mr Nice Spy

Written by Guy Bass Illustrated by Lee Robinson  
Stripes £5.99 ISBN: 978-1847159090

This book had me laughing from the very beginning and is going to be a sure-fire hit with children. Spynosaur is a dinosaur with a secret agent's mind and this story centres on his latest mission, filled with gadgets, gizmos and giggles. Aided by his daughter, Amber, Spynosaur attempts to foil the

dastardly Ergo Ego, whose nefariousness results in Spynosaur going rogue. Hilarious classified files dot the pages and the action is funny and fast-paced. Spynosaur still has some 'dino' instincts, which can lead him into trouble, not to mention that his old human clothes hardly fit him anymore!

The illustrations by Lee Robinson add to the sheer exuberance of the story and, at times, move the story through comic book strips. This is a fresh, funny and enjoyable tale and I, for one, will look out for all the other titles in this series.

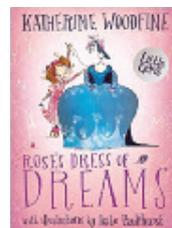
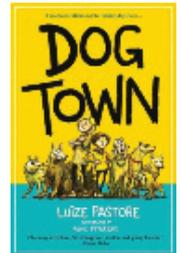
Julia Wills

### Dog Town

Written by Luize Pastore Illustrated by Reinis Petersens  
Firefly £6.99 ISBN: 978-1910080726

When Jacob's dad needs to work all summer, Jacob moves in with his uncle and cousin who live across in the other side of Riga, the capital city of Latvia. This is a much rougher part of town with more freedom for Jacob, who is used to keeping safe inside his apartment, and much more exciting residents. For a start, there is his constantly irritated cousin, Mimi, and flamboyant Uncle Eagle, but, more surprising, are the pack of talking dogs that he encounters out on the street. They need his help to thwart the evil developer, Sklyer Scraper, who plans to build a huge skyscraper forest on their patch. Jacob's love of drawing and planning helps him come up with a solution that fights back against the forces of business and gentrification. Children and talking dogs are the agents of change in this novel, which also shows Jacob growing in confidence over this summer, before his father returns. Small line drawings help to move the story along, especially when they depict Jacob's imaginative plans.

Annalise Taylor



### Rose's Dress of Dreams

Written by Katherine Woodfine  
Illustrated by Kate Pankhurst  
Barrington Stoke £6.99 ISBN: 978-1781127681

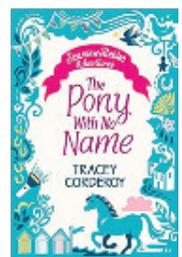
If young readers of this inspirational story are so eager to start reading that they don't notice the back cover blurb, they will enjoy an extra wave of pleasure when they find out that there is a real historical heroine behind the narrative. For this is the story of Rose Bertin, who left home, only 16 years old, to go to Paris and learn, against all the odds, to become a dressmaker. Katherine Woodfine sweeps the reader along with alluring descriptions of the dresses her young heroine dreams of making and hard-hitting scenes where Rose learns that realising her dreams is not going to be nearly as simple as learning to thread a needle. Rose perseveres, and fate conspires to introduce her to the court at Versailles, where she will become dressmaker to Marie Antoinette and the world's first fashion designer. Warm-hearted, evocative and engaging in every way, from the thoughtful prose to the atmospheric illustrations and chic design, this is a dreamy read for young fashionistas.

Tessa Strickland

### The Pony with No Name

Written by Tracey Corderoy  
Simon & Schuster £6.99 ISBN: 978-1471170416

When her father dies, Bryony, her twin brother, Josh and their mother relocate to live near their grandfather by the sea. Whilst exploring the area around her new home, Bryony manages to calm a spooked pony and an instant bond is forged between them. The pony belongs to Georgina Brook, who cares so little for the pony that she hasn't even named him. Although Georgina tells her to stay away, Bryony



finds this impossible and when Georgina develops chickenpox, she seizes her chance and offers to look after the pony. However, this ends all too soon. Full of well developed, interesting characters, the story is about family and friendship. Briony is a delightful character, full of energy and optimism, who has to cope with significant changes in her life and make new friendships. Georgina is unkind, casually using her family's wealth to manipulate others. Perfect for children who are new independent readers, but not ready for something longer. *The Pony with No Name* is an excellent story - the first in what promises to be a delightful new series called *Seaview Stables Adventures*. A brilliant read, perfect for children looking for a gentle adventure story.

Sue Wilsher



## The Chocolate Factory Ghost

Written by David O'Connell Illustrated by Claire Powell  
Bloomsbury £5.99 ISBN: 978-1408887066

Archie McBudge is astonished to learn that he has inherited all of his great-uncle's earthly possessions. At first, he assumes this is just gardening equipment, but soon realises that he now owns a large spooky house, a string of fudge shops and a chocolate factory. He has also suddenly become Chief of the

McBudge clan. But, in order to prove that he is worthy of all this wealth and greatness, his deceased great-uncle has left a test in the form of a treasure hunt. Archie must look for the clues and collect six items, but he will have to be vigilant because the Puddingham-Pye branch of the family would like him to fail. Spooky old houses are wonderful settings for humorous tales of adventure and dirty deeds and Honeystone Hall has secret tunnels, hidden rooms and mysterious creatures galore. The black and white whole-page illustrations, together with the page decorations, bring the remote Scottish village of Dundoodle and its characters and creatures to life, which all adds to the wacky humour of the text.

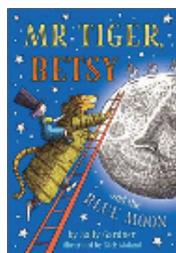
Jan Lennon

## Mr Tiger, Betsy and the Blue Moon

Written by Sally Gardner Illustrated by Nick Maland  
Zephyr £10.99 ISBN: 978-1786697172

This is a warm fantasy story, full of wishes and magic. Betsy's father is an ice-cream maker, her mother is a mermaid, and she lives by the quayside on an island which has been left off the map of the world. Her father makes the most delicious and magical ice-creams, and regularly sells them to a local toad, who, it turns out, is really a princess wronged by her wicked half-sister. When Mr Tiger arrives with his circus, young Betsy is drawn into an adventure to return the toad princess to her own island and resume her rule over her people, the Gongalongs. Children will love the zany twists to this story and the lighthearted language and humour that pervades the book. The fairy tale characters and the setting are much more fantasy than reality, but the reader is carried through by the highly inventive narrative that takes Betsy on a quest, and involves her approaching a giant for help. We are happy to suspend our scepticism and simply enjoy the story. This is a charming book with a great sense of fun, and should prove popular with newly confident readers.

Liz Dubber



## The Cursed First Term of Zelda Stitch

Written and illustrated by Nicki Greenberg  
Allen & Unwin £6.99 ISBN: 978-1760634223

Zelda is an enthusiastic new teacher in a regular primary school. She is also a witch, though not a very good one - even her cat is disdainful of her powers. In school, Zelda is determined not to reveal her heritage or use any magic at all. But this is difficult to achieve - not least because there is mischief afoot in her class and

dastardly deeds in the staff room. This is a refreshing and unusual take on the

witch-at-school theme as Zelda shares her joys and anxieties with the reader. It's funny, attractively produced and quirky, with lovely snippets of illustration.

Yvonne Coppard

## The Yark

Written by Bertrand Santini Illustrated by Laurent Gapaillard  
Gecko £6.99 ISBN: 978-1776571727

This is a very funny tale about a monster with a huge appetite for children, quite literally, until he meets Madeleine. The Yark, a large hairy monster, loves children, especially the way their bones crackle when he eats them, and how their eyes taste like chocolate truffles when he sucks them.

However, he can only eat good children as naughty children upset his stomach and give him heartburn. One day, on his quest for his next meal, the Yark comes across Madeleine, a sweet, kind and generous little girl, and he looks forward to eating her. But will he? This anarchic tale is a real delight. The Yark isn't like other monsters and we see his conflicting emotions as he eats each child. He reasons though, that if he doesn't eat them, he will starve. Although on the surface this appears quite a dark tale, there is a lot of humour, some of it quite absurd - with flatulence jokes too, which will no doubt amuse young readers. The gothic style illustrations are beautiful, truly bringing to life the unusual looking Yark. Parents are given the opportunity to discuss some of the Yark's moral dilemmas with their children. Highly recommended.

Jane Hall



## The Holidays

Devised and illustrated by Blexbolex  
Gecko £16.99 ISBN: 978-1776571932

This wordless, 124 page small-format book has a mesmerising, dreamlike quality about it. In a quiet country house surrounded by fields, woodland and a river, a small girl is whiling away her summer holiday, cared for by her grandfather. She's as free as a bird - until her grandfather collects a baby elephant at the local train station and brings it back home. Now the summer takes on a very different quality. *The Holidays* casts a very particular spell with artwork that moves effortlessly in and out of mindscapes and landscapes, interiors and exteriors, all in the heat-hazy colours and textures of summertime. An original, enchanting and beautifully realised book for imaginative young readers.

Tessa Strickland

## Natboff!: One Million Years of Stupidity

Written by Andy Stanton Illustrated by David Tazzyman  
Egmont £6.99 ISBN: 978-1405290982

Bestselling author of the *Mr Gum* series gives us a new collection of short stories set in the world of Lamoniac Bibber but taking a crazy romp through history. From 10,000 years BC to one million years in the future, Andy Stanton's own version of history may not match the history curriculum but will certainly teach children to love reading. It is presented as a series of stories, poems and even a short Shakespearean play, all of which are hilarious and in the completely bonkers trademark Andy Stanton style that children love and will have them rolling with laughter. Andy Stanton has his own brand of humour which David Tazzyman's illustrations perfectly complement. Each story in the collection is crafted to match its historical setting with characters and cross references that link them all together. The stories read aloud well but are also very accessible for reluctant readers. Yet again he has produced another entertaining and hilarious book that will be a sure fire winner with young readers.

Annie Everall

