

Staff Picks 2022

CLPE staff and their children recommend their best children's books in 2022.



Anjali Patel



Charlotte Hacking



Darren Matthews



Farrah Serroukh



Jamie Wraight



Jonny Rodgers



Lara Bell

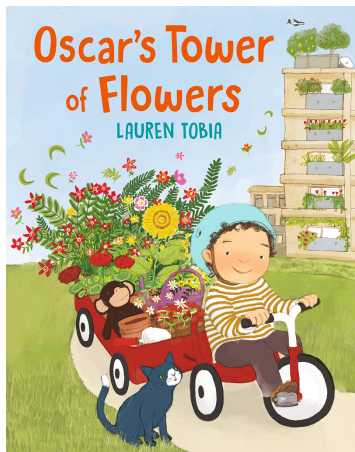


Louise Johns-Shepherd



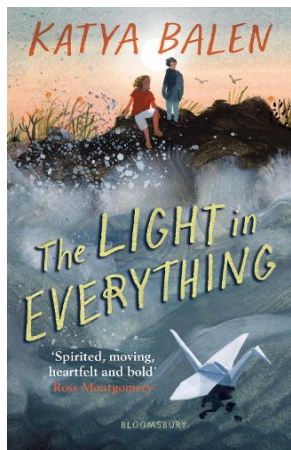
Phoebe Demeger

Anjali



Oscar's Tower of Flowers by Lauren Tobia Walker (9781529504064)

I will always pick up a book illustrated by Lauren Tobia after falling in love with her sensitive rendering of Atinuke's Anna Hibiscus and family. This wordless book is as joyous as anything you'd expect from her. We are taken into the home of Oscar's grandma and shown how even though we live right next to somebody, we can still experience isolation. Through Oscar's innocent and fresh eyes, we begin to see how a neighbouring community can flourish if we take the time to notice and give each other the care we each deserve. My family and I lived in a block of flats which was filled with plants and flowers during the Lockdown years and this story has a special place in my heart.



The Light in Everything by Katya Balen Bloomsbury (9781526622990)

The Light in Everything is a book that stays with you long after you turn the last page. It's a story told by two very different voices, Tom and Zofia, as they navigate their way through the making of a blended family whilst battling with their own challenges. So many children will recognise themselves in one or a bit of both of these characters and certainly in their experiences.

As with all of Katya Balen's work, it feels like you are given insight into an increasingly well-loved character's inner world whilst having your breath taken away by her incredible use of language as she guides you through their story. Just beautiful.

Charlotte



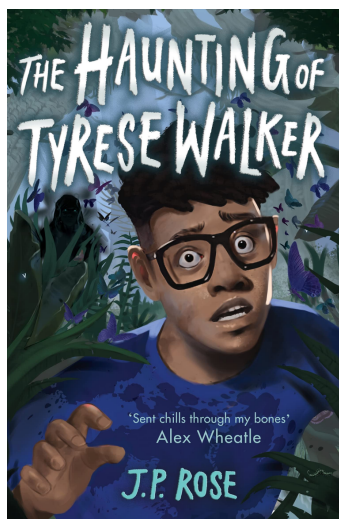
Through the Forest by Yijing Li Lantana (9781913747770)

Quiet stories are so important and are often underrated and undermarketed. These are often the stories that provoke a greater depth of thought, engagement and personal connection with children. They encourage them to empathise and connect

with themselves and the world around them in such important and invaluable ways. *Through the Forest* is one such story. The illustrations, as well as the text, are quiet and thoughtful. A muted palette with hints of colour in just the right places gives the reader a depth of understanding far beyond the words on the page. Yijing Li's style is fresh and interesting, and feels uniquely hers, not reminiscent of anything else I've seen. The story is one that is pertinent in the current climate. In a world which seems so busy, and where the constant pressure for more means we spend less time on what really matters, there is a pervading sense of emptiness and loneliness for many people. The story helps to recognise these feelings, and to support us in understanding that it's OK to feel these things and to use what's already inside us as a comfort, drawing back to what we hold dear. This would open up fascinating discussions with children (and adults!) of all ages, who would each be able to bring their own life experiences to create shared meanings and responses to this quiet but powerful book.

Other quiet books which deserve attention are Anna McQuinn and Ruth Hearson's *Zeki Rise and Shine* and *Zeki Sleep Tight*, and Joe Todd-Stanton's *The Comet*, which I picked for my Books for Keeps books of the year:

<https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/article/books-of-the-year-2022/>.



The Haunting of Tyrese Walker by J.P. Rose

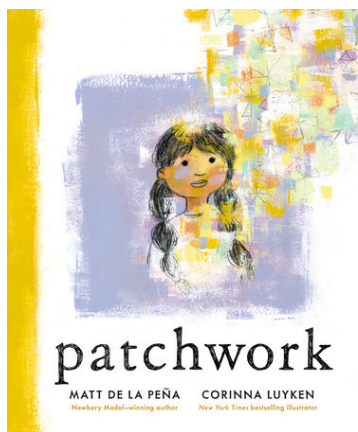
Andersen Press (9781839132407)

When I'm looking at middle-grade fiction, I'm always looking for something that is distinct and unique in a market where there is an awful lot produced, with a lot of the same voices, tropes and themes running across. When a book stands out to me, it really does stand out. Two books have really done this for me this year, *Tyger* by SF Said (also chosen in my Books for Keeps picks) and *The Haunting of Tyrese Walker*. This is a perfect title for Upper KS2 and transition to KS3. Many children here are interested in the adventure with mild peril, bordering on horror genre and there isn't a great deal out there, particularly titles that feature characters of colour as the central protagonist. The setting and character depictions by J.P. Rose are so evocative and exceptionally well portrayed.

You feel as though you are in rural Jamaica as you read, sitting alongside people you know - it is a book to truly lose yourself in.

The title gives a hint to the chilling mystery and adventure in the story, drawing on the rich history of Caribbean folklore. Avoiding the mysterious Shadow Man makes this an absolute page turner, but it also has a deeply emotional story at its heart, one with which children will engage and empathise and that can help them make sense of their own experiences and emotions at a time where there will be many changes in their own lives. This combination leads to a deep connection with the story, which will remain with you for a long time after reading. A very welcome addition to the middle-grade shelf.

Darren



Patchwork by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Corinna Luyken

Penguin Random House (9781984813961)

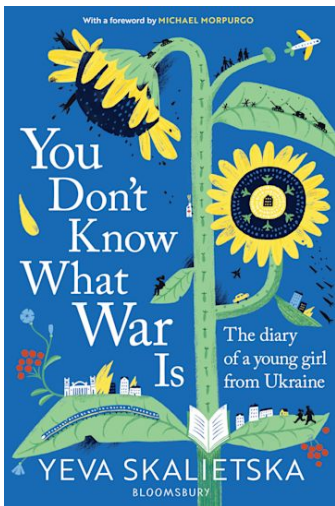
In this latest picturebook, Matt de la Peña – who in partnership with Christian Robinson crafted the award-winning *Last Stop on Market Street* and last year’s stunning *Milo Imagines the World* – has composed a heart-felt ode to possibility and the unique nature of each child. Here, he has partnered with Corinna

Luyken who has crafted the perfect visual companion for Matt’s words. Smudged graphite lines lovingly sketch out each child, first introduced with a single key colour (“You were blue before you were even born. We mark, we mark...” says the text) against a background haze of squares like graph paper holding the figure in place. But then, as we turn the pages, new pastel colours are introduced, the lines loosen and overlap, softening the grid as it expands across the page.

The gentle text invites the reader to ask questions of ourselves and others, and to value the multitudes of possibility ahead for each child. It embraces the chaos and the complexity of a life lived – the patchwork present in the words and those intersecting lines behind each picture. The reader is reassured that it’s alright not to know who

we are yet: to experiment, to play, to try a different path. We are reminded that none of us can be so simply pigeon-holed: the dancer becomes a mathematician, the basketball player a poet... None of us are just one thing alone, there are an infinite number of facets to our lives, and we never know where one passion may lead us.

Towards the end, we are returned to this concept through the metaphor of music: “You are more than a single note – played again and again. You are a symphony.” This musicality is present on each spread, it feels like listening to a perfect song; one that, as soon as the last notes fade, you hurry to play again.



You Don't Know What War Is by Yeva Skalietska
Bloomsbury (9781526659934)

Children's literature is replete with characters faced with, fleeing from and changed by the horrors of war. In the coming years, I'm certain that many great writers for young people will seek to understand and interpret the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. *You Don't Know What War Is* by Yeva Skalietska provides a strikingly immediate account of one child's first-hand experience of the first few weeks of that invasion; of the

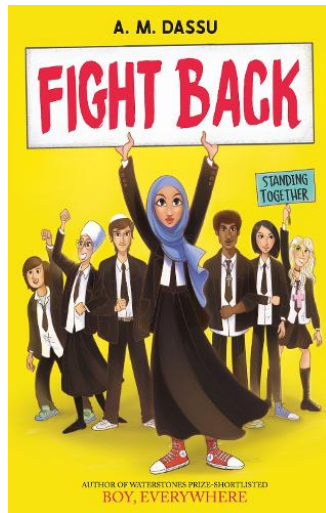
sudden jarring transition from peace to war, from safety to danger, from the mundane and everyday to an incomprehensible loss of all that came before.

In her diary entries, 12-year-old Yeva recounts her friendships and her home, and then all too quickly the first missile strikes in Kharkiv and her subsequent desperate attempt to find safety. Throughout, photos taken by Yeva's grandmother, headlines from newspapers and social media, and extracts from her friends' text message thread further add to the account, as does a short section at the end in which some of her friends present their own stories.

What stays after reading aren't only the horrors of war, but the many moments of human kindness: the kind word, the simple gift, the removal of red tape, the offer of shelter, the gentle refusal of payment. This book offers a stark and important reminder that, while it has vanished from the front pages, this war – and many others – persists and thousands of children and families continue to seek refuge – or,

for those who have found safe harbour, wait to return and see what remains of their home.

Farrah



Fight Back by A.M. Dassu

Scholastic (9780702315886)

Books offer glimpses into the heart, mind and soul of an author. Fragments of places, faces, sounds, smells, moments, thoughts, feelings and ideas all inspire and shape the story worlds they create. It is therefore often through the process of crafting and sharing stories, that the author gifts the reader a part of themselves. What Dassu has gifted readers in this powerful, gut-wrenching, and heartfelt follow-up to her award-winning

debut *Boy, Everywhere* is a nuanced, honest portrayal of the aftermath of a terrorist attack and the complex ways in which the aftershock, pain, damage and consequences continue to reverberate for a long time after. It is told from the perspective of Aaliyah, a relatable, smart, fun-loving and caring young person, who must navigate a once safe and familiar world that now feels consumed with fear, hate, mistrust, suffering, prejudice and toxicity. Her vulnerability is palpable and the hope she inspires through her bravery, persistence and passion sows much needed seeds of hope, a hope that Dassu embodies in all that she does through her creative endeavours and advocacy. The book world is a better place for having Aaliyah and Dassu in it, both encouraging us to fight back in the pursuit for a better world for all.



In Our Hands by Lucy Farfort

Tate Publishing (9781849768146)

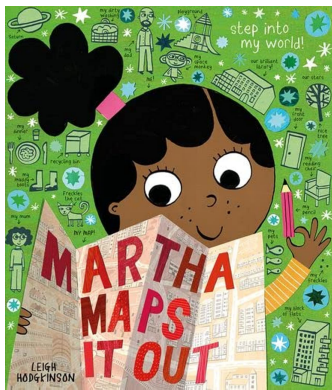
Lucy Farfort's debut as author and illustrator *In Our Hands* is a timely, heartfelt fable that explores the power of hope. When the world is plagued by isolation and cursed to live without colour,

it is up to a group of determined children to grow a seed of hope that will inspire everyone to come together and build a better future. Through the delicately detailed

illustrations and gradual unfolding of the story, the reader experiences how small actions, persistence, and a commitment to making things better can manifest in fundamental and big changes. It conveys the importance of working together and the value of community.

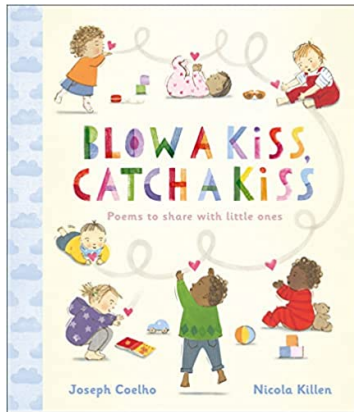
At a time in which hope can often feel hard to muster, a book like this is all the more important. The subtle and evocative details contained within each spread offer a profound and wonderfully effective way of articulating to young readers how simple steps and coming together can be transformative. It is a thoughtful, beautiful, inspiring call to action and showcases Farfort's immense talent, which I'm sure we will continue to enjoy in the many future publications to come.

Jamie



Martha Maps It Out by Leigh Hodgkinson Oxford University Press (9780192777782)

I absolutely love this book! It is an utterly joyous exploration of the world around us through the eyes of a thoughtful, curious girl who takes us on a journey from the centre of the universe to the centre of her thoughts. It is perfect for young children with inquisitive minds, encouraging them to question the world around them and encourage them to harness their creativity, be brave and be ambitious. Martha, the titular character, charts out her future success by inviting us to step into her world and learn her personal geography. On every page there are strikingly detailed yet charmingly simplistic illustrations that captivate the interests of the reader, showing us a glimpse of Martha's thoughts and inviting us to find out more about each of the places. My favourite spread is Martha's 'map of thoughts' where we learn all about what interests Martha; she has so many questions about the world and what she can do to make the most of it. Each page invites the reader to explore more about Martha and her life and Martha's experiences are very relatable for young children. The book promotes and celebrates the potential in every person, as well as championing the successes of a female protagonist interested in STEM careers, as well as being diverse and inclusive. A great book for young readers; every time my daughter and I pick it up to read, we continue to discover something new.



Blow a Kiss, Catch a Kiss by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Nicola Killen

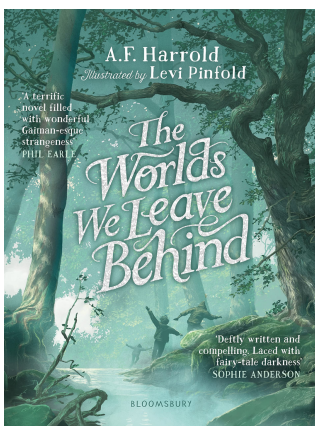
Andersen Press (9781839131363)

This is a stunning collection of poems for very young children, written by the Children’s Laureate Joseph Coelho, which would be the perfect Christmas present for any little one in your life. It is full of playful, thoughtful and emotive rhymes and verses that

will engage and inspire any reader. The poems are organised into four sections: All About Me, Out and About, What Do I Feel? and At Home, and are beautifully illustrated by Nicola Kellen. The instant relatability of each poem allows children to identify with the characters and themes explored and the diverse and inclusive nature of the illustrations empower all readers to feel represented. Some of mine and my children’s favourite poems include ‘Shopping Adventure’, ‘The Journey Game’ and ‘Collecting’, just a few examples that remind us of our own family lives and those of my childhood too. The whole collection is great to read aloud and my kids love creating actions to accompany them.

Poetry is such an important medium in helping children to gain a voice in expressing what they want as well as encapsulating moments that are familiar, funny and relatable, and this collection does this perfectly. It supports children to explore their own individuality and that of others; they can see that everyone has a place in poetry. The memories this collection has evoked in me and my children has reignited our passion as a family to read more poetry together.

Jonny



The Worlds We Leave Behind by A.F. Harrold, illustrated by Levi Pinfold

Bloomsbury (9781526623881)

I’ve been excited about this latest A.F. Harrold/Levi Pinfold collaboration since A.F. shared the opening chapter at a Power of Reading launch event over a year before it came out, but it was genuinely worth the wait. Inconceivably, this perfect pairing

may have surpassed their work in *The Song from Somewhere Else*. A.F. creates credible and convincing characters in incredible yet somehow plausible situations; the worlds he conjures up are imaginative and imaginable, he deals with big questions so deftly, irresistibly draws you into the narrative, and his language is so readable, satisfying and witty, which I enjoy. Friendship — its highs and lows — lies at the heart of this extraordinary story through a daring exploration of the all too human drive for revenge and retribution. But it is also about putting the world right again.



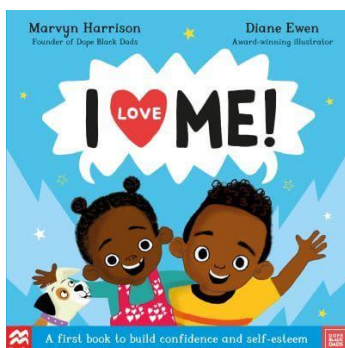
Paradise Sands by Levi Pinfold

Walker Studio (9781406383942)

A new title from genius Levi Pinfold is a publishing landmark for me, so a year with three LP titles constitutes a bonanza. His

pairing with other authors — with A.F. Harrold on *The Song from Somewhere Else* and *The Worlds We Leave Behind*, and with David Almond on *The Dam* — has produced three of my favourite books ever, but I think the picturebooks where he is both author and illustrator — *The Django*, *Greenling*, *Black Dog* and now *Paradise Sands* — achieve something transcendent. There is something deliciously unsettling in this mysterious modern fairy-tale, so rich in ambiguities and suggestion, Levi's sumptuous artwork is mesmerizingly beautiful, and the book demands repeated rereading as you pore over each page and drink in the eeriness.

Lara



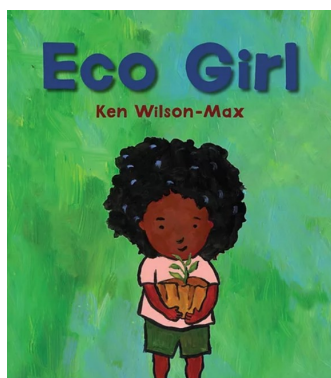
I Love Me! by Marvyn Harrison, illustrated by Diane Ewen

Macmillan (9781529083880)

I Love Me! written by Marvyn Harrison (founder of Dope Black Dads) and beautifully illustrated by Diane Ewen (the award-winning illustrator of Floella Benjamin's *Coming to England*) is a joyful and empowering text centred around positive affirmations

for young children. It follows a week in the life of a brother and sister with their father, where each morning they stand in the mirror together and proudly say aloud their affirmations. Each page spread takes an affirmation for that day and vibrantly illustrates how the siblings demonstrate these powerful words and actions in their own lives. The simple and repetitive sentence structure, the first-person narration,

combined with the affirmations presented in large speech bubbles, means that as you read you cannot help but hear the children's voices loudly and proudly through the pages. It is clear that the book has been created with parents and carers in mind. It includes a helpful 'Reading Together' section and thoughtfully written prompts for adults to use to further engage children in discussions around their Personal, Social and Emotional Development. I love that the illustrations and layout of the text on the page are reminiscent of comic books, making the siblings look like proud, powerful and positive superheroes!



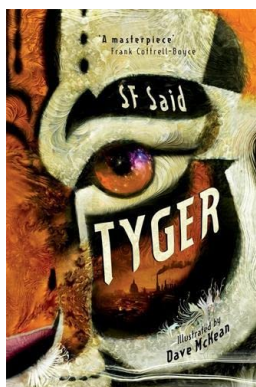
Eco Girl by Ken Wilson-Max

Otter-Barry Books (9781913074319)

Eve loves trees so much she wants to be a tree – not just any tree: a Baobab tree. Eve is the perfect inspiring role-model of an ecologically minded, caring, patient, curious and imaginative learner. The story follows the little girl on the day before her

birthday as she travels across the forest to visit her Grandma. Grandma gives her a great surprise: her very own Baobab seedling for her to plant next to the trees grown and lovingly cared for by the generations before her. It is a touching tale of familial love and love for the environment. Similar to Ken Wilson-Max's earlier text *Astro Girl*, *Eco Girl* ends on a non-fiction section providing young readers with wider context and facts about trees and their importance in our ecosystem. Whilst it's hard to isolate just one part of this stunningly illustrated book, the image of Eve standing, barefoot in a muddy puddle, arms spread wide, in the pouring rain pretending to be a tree reminds me of my own childhood and my love of gathering fallen fruit, leaves and seeds and making deliciously vulgar mud pies.

Louise



Tyger by SF Said, illustrated by Dave McKean

David Fickling Books (9781788452830)

I have to admit to pulling rank a bit to get this one as my pick because it is the stand-out book of the year for so many of us at CLPE (and we were so delighted that SF chose to launch it in the CLPE Library). I have chosen it because it was my favourite

adventure story of 2022, and I love an adventure story. This book has everything you need to get lost in an alternative world: relatable characters; twisty turning streets and escapades; myths and monstrous injustice overcome by bravery and imagination. There's so much in there: the imagery, the Blake references, the library and the importance of books and creativity, the investigation of privilege and power - but none of it is laboured, just sprinkled over the brilliant plot like the very best seasoning. I think there will be children who race through this book (like I did) because the adventure story within it is so exciting but who will find that they have learnt so much by having read this work. It's a total triumph of story and one which I know will become a future classic.



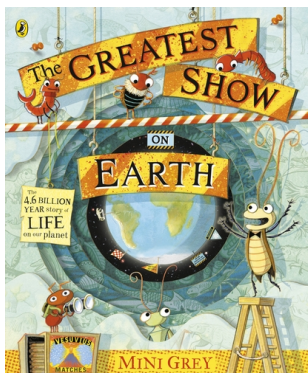
Our Tower by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Richard Johnson

Frances Lincoln (9780711268821)

I've chosen this picturebook because the combination of words and pictures makes it such a compelling and fascinating reading experience. The poetic words draw on Joseph Coelho's own

experience growing up in a tower block and celebrate the beauty of the city setting as a place where magic and adventure mix with the natural and the built environment. Richard Johnson's illustrations take the words and wrap them in even more beauty. The reader goes from the initial pages "boring, hard and grey" (they aren't!) through to the bright yellow pages at the end where we literally see the tower block in a new light. The design of the book makes you turn it sideways and upside down and gives a whole other dimension to the story. This is a marrying of poetry and art that will inspire older readers to pore over the words and the pictures, to turn pages back and forth and find something new on every spread.

Phoebe

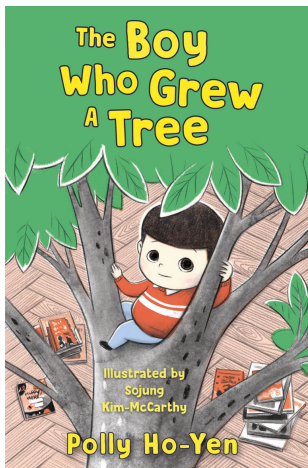


The Greatest Show on Earth by Mini Grey

Puffin (9780241480830)

I knew as soon as I read *The Greatest Show on Earth* – an illustrated tour through 4.6 billion years of life on Earth – that it would be in the running for one of my best books of the year. Our dapper narrator, Rod the Roach, introduces his troupe of insect

performers to the stage of a shoebox theatre in the middle of a rubbish dump, and it only gets better from there. By using the framing of a theatre set to tell the story of Earth's history, author-illustrator Mini Grey packs so much information onto every page, while remaining incredibly entertaining throughout. The main action, performed by insect puppeteers, unfolds onstage; in the orchestra pit, an ever-unfurling timeline tracks key geological events in Earth's history; and plentiful facts and diagrams can be found in the wings. It's such an inventive concept and carried out so creatively – it's hard not to imagine classrooms around the country building their own cardboard theatres and trilobite puppets! The book is not without its emotional beats: the troupe invites us to look to the far future, and asks: is the idea of humans someday living in balance with other living things really as outlandish as fungus overlords taking over the planet? This moment of reflection is mirrored in a closing spread, where we pan out from the theatre to reveal the vast scale of the rubbish dump, implying that humanity's mark on the planet – along with cockroaches – will endure past the point of imagination. As a work of non-fiction, a creative endeavour, and a call for environmental awareness, *The Greatest Show on Earth* is simply spectacular.



The Boy Who Grew a Tree by Polly Ho-Yen, illustrated by Sojung Kim-McCarthy
Knights Of (9781913311308)

Sometimes, it's the quietest stories that stay with you the most.

A recurring theme in children's books is the arrival of a new baby sibling, and all the changes and challenges that it brings. In *The Boy Who Grew a Tree*, author Polly Ho-Yen puts a gently magical

spin on this theme, in which a nature-loving young boy named Timi retreats from the upheaval of his home life into the abandoned local library, where he finds a seedling sprouting through the floorboards. He sneaks in every day to water and nurture it, but the tree is growing far too fast to be contained...

It's a strikingly enchanting metaphor that can be read in many different ways. For me, Timi's diligent care for the tree mirrors his inevitable love and care for his baby sister, and also represents how feelings can get out of hand when you hide them; it's only

when sharing them that things become manageable. The book also features representation of a single-parent family, and the community network of aunts and after-school clubs that help hold things together. The climax, too, is one of community activism, as Timi and his friends come together to save the library – and its tree – from being demolished.

Sojung Kim-McCarthy's greyscale illustrations, which are so expressive in their simplicity, add to the book's emotional resonance, plus the short chapters make this an ideal read for Lower KS2. A quietly moving and utterly charming story.

The children of CLPE staff have also been enjoying some good books this year.

Sonny (Anjali's son, aged 11)



Loki: A Bad God's Guide to Taking the Blame by Louie Stowell

Walker (9781529501223)

I love the Loki books and this one is as funny as the first. I wish all books could be like this. In fact, every time I start a new book at the moment, I wish it was a Loki. I can't wait for the third in the series. I like how Louie Stowell has woven in the Norse Gods and myths through the stories. They are really clever and humorous.



The Good Turn by Sharna Jackson

Puffin (9780241523599)

The Good Turn is just brilliant. It creates a flood of imagination during the day when I'm thinking about the plot and what might happen next time dad reads it to me. And it is always unexpected! The characters do things that I wouldn't dream of like investigating a light in an abandoned factory at night-time. They are all funny as well as being caring. Josephine is the leader

but she's so serious and forgets about other people's feelings sometimes. Margot wants to be funny but she ends up being inappropriate. And Wesley is my favourite. Read it now. It's great.

Chosen by Sonny and his Dad, Stuart, who is a teacher.

Lana (Anjali's daughter, aged 13):



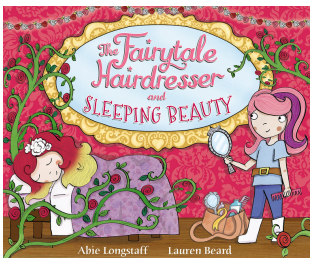
Take Me With You When You Go by David Levithan and Jennifer Niven

Penguin (9780241550809)

This book is about a boy called Ezra's sister who runs away from an abusive family and leaves him and her boyfriend behind. I chose this book because I read it in about a week as I couldn't put it down when I started it. I really enjoyed this book because it tells the story just through emails that Ezra and his sister (Bea) have

sent to each other which is a great way to tell the story as it gives you two different viewpoints and perspectives on what has happened. It is such an interesting story, as both characters have different journeys throughout the book in finding themselves and learning more about their family and past.

Violet (Dawn's daughter, aged 5):



The Fairytale Hairdresser and Rapunzel: 10th Anniversary Edition by Abie Longstaff, illustrated by Lauren Beard

Puffin (9780241500828)

Violet loves the Disney film Rapunzel so any books which include Rapunzel are always a hit with Violet. She enjoys seeing all the familiar characters in the book. The Fairytale Hairdresser, Kitty Lacey, "the best hairdresser in all the land" gets up to all sorts of fun doing hair styles for lots of exciting people, including Goldilocks who needs her hair to be "just right". Another customer of Kitty's is none other than the Father Christmas who Violet is always excited to see in the book. She enjoys the adventure of Kitty rescuing Rapunzel from the evil witch but not before

turning her long locks into a stylish plait to help make their escape from the witch's tower! This book celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2022 with a new edition.

Emily (Dawn's daughter, aged 2):



Squirrel's Snowman by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler

Macmillan (9781529034370)

Emily is currently a big fan of a lift-the-flap-style book, particularly the 'Tales from Acorn Wood' series. *Squirrel's*

Snowman is one of Emily's favourites from the series and she likes to pretend to eat the carrots and the snowman cookies which she finds in the book along the way. She also loves a squirrel and enjoys pointing and shouting rather loudly "wirrel" whenever we read the book or see one whilst walking out and about near our home.

Jacob (Jamie's son, aged 8):



Twitch and Spark by M.G. Leonard

Walker (9781406389371 and 9781406389388)

What I particularly like about these two books is that they are really good mysteries and there is wildlife in them too - I have learned so much about birds and nature. I just couldn't put them down; each chapter ends on a cliff-hanger and I wanted to keep reading to find out what happened next – I just needed to know! I love that *Twitch* focused on the main character Twitch and then

Spark explored the main character Jack. I got to find out more about Jack's personality and I enjoyed seeing their friendship develop. It reminded me of me and my friends playing at school.

M.G. Leonard is one of my favourite authors at the moment because I can really relate to her characters. She brings them to life and makes me feel like I am in the story with them. Reading these books has inspired me to read her 'Adventures on Trains' series and I have also just finished reading *The Highland Falcon Thief*. I am so looking forward to reading her next book in the Twitcher series, *Clutch*, when it comes out next year!

Isaac (Jamie's son, aged 6) and Martha (Jamie's daughter, aged 3):



The Mini Rabbit series by John Bond: *Mini Rabbit Not Lost, Mini Rabbit Must Help* and *Mini Rabbit Come Home*

HarperCollins (9780008264840, 9780008264895 and 9780008264949)



Isaac – I like Mini Rabbit because he goes on adventures, and I like going on adventures too. The pictures show us what Mini Rabbit cannot see and it is funny that we know what is going to happen before he does. My favourite one is *Mini Rabbit Not Lost* because he wants a cake but he thinks he has no berries, so he goes looking for some but doesn't realise that there is a berry bush underneath his tree house, then when he does get cake he just wants ice cream instead. He is very funny and brave but a bit irresponsible too.



Martha – I like *Mini Rabbit Must Help* because the rabbit loses his letter and he has to go and find it, but then it gets stuck to his backpack and he doesn't notice, even at the end. That's my favourite bit!

Remi (Kiri's son, aged 4):



***We're Going to Find the Monster!* by Malorie Blackman, illustrated by Dapo Adeola**

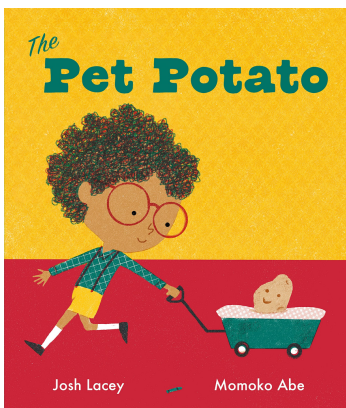
Puffin (9780241401309)

It is always great to find a book to read to young children that you also enjoy, and this is one that has become a favourite in our household. This adventure is one where Charlie and Eddie have to venture through jungles and oceans on their mission to find a monster, which is humorously revealed at the end to be

their 'smelly, messy' older brother, or evidently a tickle monster! With imagination at its core, it explores the limitless ways in how young children play.

The dynamic of siblings in this playful book really resonates with Remi and he often acts out the journey of the story, encouraging participation from his younger brother. I've found it has encouraged his own creative ideas when playing, and he improvises with his toys to create a similar story, utilising every part of the house in the same way the characters do!

The repetitive phrase used in the book and the rhythm building on each page means Remi can 'read' the book from memory and often shares this lovely moment with his little brother Kai. Visually the book has so much to offer too: the characters have been so thoughtfully created to reflect the thread of children's resourcefulness, with Charlie using a pan as a hat with a red cape tied around her neck, and Eddie with his teddy backpack and aviator hat and goggles, reflecting their personalities perfectly. Remi even has a hat like Eddie's which is now his favourite.



The Pet Potato by Josh Lacey, illustrated by Momoko Abe

Andersen Press (9781839130809)

Albert wants a pet and nothing else for his birthday or Christmas which his parents have refused, so his joking dad gifts Albert a present that he initially isn't very taken with. Remi loves to scrunch up his nose and laugh when Albert

unwraps a "A Potato?!" After first neglecting the idea of a pet potato, Albert then becomes very attached to his new pet and they enjoy a fun-filled few days at the park, going to the library, swimming and playing together, until he wakes up on Sunday to find his friend is missing from his pillow. After upsettingly finding his mouldy companion in the bin, Albert is offered what he originally wanted from his parents, a real pet, but all he wants is his potato back, so his dad helps him bury it in the garden and they tend to it, growing many more to share.

The story cleverly weaves concepts of humour, responsibility, imagination, attachment and (very lightly) loss. The subtle wit in the book is great as an adult reader, and the first pet theme is one I'm sure many parents find familiar.

For Remi the family dynamic of both a white parent and black parent is also one that inadvertently helps him connect with the book. Accompanied by curated collages of their adventures, including some great expressions and costumes on the potato, the illustration really brings the whole story to life.

Kai (Kiri's son, aged 2):



Well Done, Mummy Penguin by Chris Haughton

Walker (9781406385533)

Kai was drawn to this book in the shop, which is no surprise considering the bold artwork. Chris Haughton's crisp, bright illustrations are eye-catching and work harmoniously alongside the simple and heart-warming story, celebrating

the dynamics of the penguin family and the efforts and resilience of 'Mummy Penguin'. It is a great introduction to a wonderful animal. The scattered use of onomatopoeia – "cu-crunch", "swoosh", "tiptoe" – encourage Kai's speech and he always enjoys repeating these parts of the book back to me.

I'M STICKING WITH YOU
SMRITI HALLS STEVE SMALL



I'm Sticking With You by Smriti Halls, illustrated by Steve Small

Simon & Schuster (9781471182815)

This is Kai's favourite bedtime book, and after approximately 365 reads, now one I know by heart! The concept is about friendship, and both its challenges and value are wittily weaved using bouncy rhyme and comical illustration on every page. The juxtaposition of Bear and Squirrel make for a

great choice of protagonists, and as the story develops, their unwavering friendship comes to a halt when Squirrel wants to be alone. After realising he misses Bear, Squirrel asks him to come back and their friendship resumes, with a more grateful appreciation for each other. There is something on each page that initiates a pause from Kai, whether is it pointing out the fact that Squirrel has shot off into the air when he and Bear are on the seesaw, or the cup of tea and doughnut which we have to acknowledge every time the pair make-up. This is a classic, enjoyed by both of my boys, and one that I can never see them getting bored of.