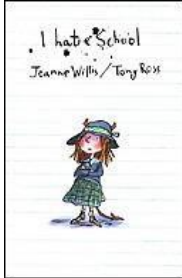


Recommended Reading List – Key Stage 1

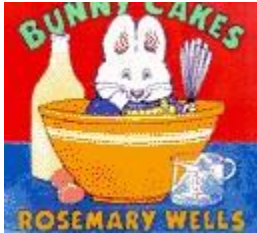
4 Years and upwards

I Hate School, by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross (Anderson Press £5.99)



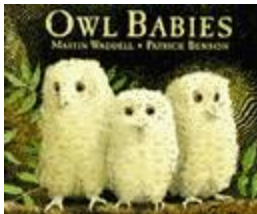
[Buy I Hate School at the Guardian bookshop](#) Honor Brown hates school, the worms the dinner ladies feed them, the smelly sand-pit, the killer sharks in the water tray. But what do you know? Come the end of year six, she is in tears at the thought of leaving. For all who are starting school this week, and for their parents who need a laugh.

Bunny Cakes by Rosemary Wells (Picture Corgi, £4.99)



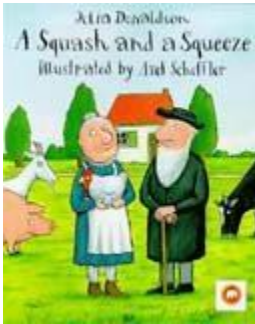
It is impossible not to fall in love with Max the tearaway toddler rabbit who gives his rather bossy big sister Ruby a pretty hard time. Max causes mayhem in the kitchen when Ruby decides to make a cake for grandma's birthday, and gets to have his cake and eat it in the shape of red hot marshmallow squirters for his earthworm surprise cake. It is very simple, smart and sassy and the shopping lists get even the very young reading.

Owl Babies by Martin Waddell, illustrated by Patrick Benson (Walker, £4.99)



Dealing in a really imaginative way with the idea of separation from the mum you really love, this is a wonderful book that makes you feel cosy just to think about it. Benson's illustrations have a wonderful expressive quality.

A Squash and a Squeeze by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler (Mammoth, £4.99)



Endearingly dotty version of old English folk tale about a woman who thinks that her house is too small, and so it proves when the farmyard animals turn up. The text is simple and silly and the illustrations capture the sense of ordinary life gone mad.

The Big Big Sea by Martin Waddell , illustrated by Jennifer Eachus (Walker, £4.99)



One of those intensely magical books in which words and pictures come together to create a portrait of the world that is just a little bit different. It is a book about the importance of the very smallest things in life. A little picture book with a big wild heart.

My Uncle is a Hunkle Says Clarice by Lauren Child (Orchard, £10.99)



Lauren Child has burst exuberantly upon children's publishing with her funny daffy stories about Clarice Bean, a small girl who is eight going on eighty-eighty and who lives in a very modern household that is always in uproar. The latest has a ticklish title and is a ticklish book with Child's trademark hurdy gurdy mixture of drawings, photos and clever typography - the words for driving to the hospital very fast are very squiggly. Other delicious titles include Clarice Bean, That's Me and I Will Not Never Eat a

Tomato.

The It-Doesn't Matter Suit by Sylvia Plath (Faber £3.99)



Only it matters a lot to Max, youngest of seven brothers residing in the town of Winkelburg, that he is the only member of his family that hasn't got a suit. But when a mysterious parcel arrives and it turns out to be a mustard yellow suit, Max is the last in line for a particularly special hand-me-down. Plath's book has a charming, dead-pan humour that is matched by Rotraut Susanne Berner's illustrations.

The Sea-Thing Child by Russell Hoban, illustrated by Patrick Benson (Walker, £10.99)



Russell Hoban's superb 30-year-old classic about the terrible power of nature seen through the sea and shoreline and the eyes of the seathing child as he grows in experience and confidence. Patrick Benson's paintings marvellously capture the immensity of the sea and sky.



Josie Smith in Summer by Magdalen Nabb (Collins, £3.99)

One in a jolly little series of nine books that tell of the adventures of the irrepressible Josie, her family and friends. These books are not stunningly well-written or even particularly perceptive, but their charm is in their depiction of everyday life, the perils and pleasures of friendship, the cares and concerns of Josie and her quirky view of adult behaviour. Child-sized in every way and all the better for it, these are books for readers going solo for the first time.

Rosie's Babies by Martin Waddell and Penny Dale (Walker, £4.50)

There are enchanting, highly detailed pastel pictures to accompany this story about four-year-old Rosie, trying to get her mum's attention while she puts the baby to bed. Rosie tells her own stories about her babies, bear and rabbit: how they make her cross, what she gives them to eat - apples, pears and grapes (but they do not like the pips). This is a great insight into the egocentric world of the small child and a gentle and sympathetic account of sibling rivalry.

The Cat in the Hat by Dr Seuss (Collins, £4.99)

We are in two minds about the world of Dr Seuss. We love the Cat in the Hat; we love it when The Cat in the Hat Comes Back, even naughtier than before. He is such a character - like the mad, bad, wild creature that lurks inside even the best behaved child - that you cannot help falling for him, even if the rhythm of the piece is irritatingly train-like. It is the other Dr Seuss titles that give us a problem. Is there a child in the world who really enjoys reading "I am Sam and Sam I am?" Sales suggest there are, but we bet it is parents anxious about their children reading, not children, who demand these titles.

Dogger by Shirley Hughes (Collins, £4.99)

A good story told with empathy for what it feels like to lose your favourite teddy - or, in this case, Dogger, a worn old dog that belongs to Dave. When Dave loses him at the school fete he only gets him back because of a generous gesture by his big sister, Bella.

The Mousehole Cat by Antonia Barber and Nicola Bayley (Walker, £4.99)

An utterly magical picture book with rich, vividly coloured illustrations, friezes and borders that complement Barber's simple, almost severe telling of the dramatic Cornish legend of Mowser the Cat and Tom, the old fisherman, who brave the fury of the Great Storm Cat to save their village from starving.

The Children of Lir by Shelia MacGill-Callahan (Ragged Bears, £9.99)

What are almost pre-Raphaelite pictures accompany this retelling of the legend of the children of the king of Ireland who are turned into swans by their wicked stepmother. Writing and visuals set each other off to create a rich story about the making and breaking of spells and the sorrow of exile. A book for sharing.

The Snowman by Raymond Briggs (Penguin, £9.99)

A classic story, told entirely without words, of the magical friendship between a boy and his frozen friend. Actually much improved by not having to listen to Walking On Air while watching the story unfold. If you like this, try The Bear - much the same except that the friend is furry.

Poems For the Very Young selected by Michael Rosen (Kingfisher, £6.99)

An excellent collection to suit all tastes. Worth it alone for Jack Prelutsky's Spaghetti! Spaghetti! - the kind of nourishing poetry that four-year-olds really understand.

Twinkle Twinkle Chocolate Bar compiled by John Foster (OUP, £7.99)

Some funny and some silly rhymes about swings and see-saws, cats and dogs, mums and dads, dragons and giants, and mudpie stew. Great fun.

The Owl and the Pussycat by Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear (OUP, £5.99)

Nonsense rhymes by two of the greatest exponents, beautifully illustrated with rich Victorian-style illustrations by Nicki Palin.

The Teddy Robber by Ian Beck (Corgi, £3.99)

Someone is stealing Teddies; Tom is determined to find out who, and is in for a giant surprise. This story is a mini-adventure for the very young with illustrations that play cleverly with size and perspective to give a sense of what it is like to be small in a big world.

Avocado Baby by John Burningham (Red Fox, £4.50)

This story tickles the sense of humour of the very young, and follows a weedy baby in a weedy family who beats the bullies when it starts on a diet of avocado pears.

Willy's Pictures by Anthony Browne (Walker, £10.99)

There is something completely clear-eyed and honest about the way Browne views the world of families and children. In the brilliant Zoo (Red Fox, £4.50), he charts a day out in which it is the humans who behave like the zoo's animals. This book is just as original, with Browne recreating some of the world's most famous paintings, adding to each his best-loved character, Willy the chimp. Magritte, Dali, Rousseau and Edward Hopper all get the monkey treatment; the results are funny and disturbing at the same time.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter (Puffin, £4.99)

Large-format version of the classic tale about the disobedient little rabbit in Mr McGregor's garden who almost ends up as stew.

Reckless Ruby by Hiawyn Oram (Carnival, £4.99)

Ruby's parents think she is so precious that they want to wrap her in cotton wool. Ruby has other ideas, and decides that only by being reckless can she avoid this terrible fate. Crucial reading for little girls who do not want to grow up to marry princes.

Winnie the Witch by Korky Paul and Valerie Thomas (OUP, £3.99)

A Children's Book Award winner that full of visual jokes and amusing detail. Winnie the Witch decides that having a black cat when you live in an all-black house is very confusing.

Not Now, Bernard by David McKee (Red Fox, £3.99)

One of those books that stays in the mind. Bernard would like a little attention from his parents, but they are so busy they do not even notice that he has been eaten and replaced by a monster. McKee's sly pictures are so delicious you want to gobble them up. A stark reminder that there is no such thing as quality time.

Princess Smartypants by Babette Cole (Puffin, £4.99)

This princess enjoys being a Ms, but all the princes want her to be their Mrs. A feminist fairytale with a difference, full of good humour. If you enjoy this, try Cole's genderbending variation on the Cinderella story, Prince Cinders.

**Mrs Wobble the Waitress by Allan Alberg (Puffin,
£3.99)**

One in a series of user-friendly and funny stories that help children learn to read without patronising either them or their parents. Our favourites are Mr Biff the Boxer, Mr Tick the Teacher, and Mrs Jolly's Joke Shop, from which most children learn their first knock knock joke.

**Something Else by Kathryn Cave and Chris Riddell.
(Puffin, £4.99)**

Elsie tries and fails to be like everyone else, then something completely different turns up and wants to be friends. A gentle, eloquently told story about the meaning of tolerance.

**Winnie the Pooh by AA Milne (World International,
£4.95)**

Your children may well have been introduced to Pooh, Christopher Robin and the "100 aker wood" long before reaching four, but now is the time to start reading them the full version with colour illustrations by EH Shepard. Just don't try to imitate Alan Bennett when you do.

5 Years and upwards

The Magic Finger by Roald Dahl (Puffin, £3.99)

The little girl in this fantasy has a unique gift. When someone makes her angry she simply points her finger and - zap! - an instant punishment is visited on the offender.

When her teacher calls her "a stupid little girl" because she misspells cat, she points her finger and her teacher sprouts whiskers. Quite right! A small child used to being coerced will warm to the summary justice meted out in this tale. A little book with a great big message about the enormity of small children's feelings.

The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters by Janet and Allan Ahlberg (Puffin, £11.99)

Children are intrigued by this highly original book containing witty cards in envelopes for the Jolly Postman to deliver to fairytale characters. Hours and hours of fun.

6 Years and upwards

The Dinosaur's Packed Lunch by Jacqueline Wilson (Corgi, £3.50)

A great story about a little girl who is looked after by her dad, and has the day from hell on a school visit to the dinosaur museum. Things look up when she turns into a dinosaur, although being scaly-skinned brings its own problems. A perceptive story from an author likely to figure large in your child's reading over the years.

Advanced readers could also try Cliffhanger (£3.99), a good read about Tim, a boy who is hopeless at sport and, to his horror, is sent away on an adventure holiday.

Mossycoat by Philip Pullman (Scholastic, £1)

A brilliant, simple idea - and talk about value for money! A series of well-known tales retold by some of the best writers around; each is just fantastic and at £1 very affordable. We have not seen one that is not beautifully, sometimes heart-breakingly, written or wittily illustrated. Besides Pullman's dark vision of the girl whose mum made her a mossy coat, you can get Anne Fine's version of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, Gillian Cross's exquisitely simple telling of the Goose Girl, Berlie Doherty's the Snow Queen, and Henrietta Branford's creepy Hansel and Gretel. The list grows longer, parents more thankful. Begin by reading them to your children, and the older ones will start collecting them themselves with their pocket money.

The Enormous Crocodile by Roald Dahl (Puffin, £5.99)

A golloping, gulping, grumptious story from the master storyteller, concerning a horrid, greedy, brutish crocodile who has secret plans and clever tricks to fill up his tummy with a yummy child. Will make them scream with laughter.

**The Adventures of Mr Toad by Kenneth Grahame,
abridged and illustrated by Inga Moore (Walker
£14.99)**

An introduction to the riotous adventures of the wayward toad. Full colour illustrations.

7 Years and upwards

**The Enchanted Horse by Magdalen Nabb (Collins,
£3.50)**

Irina is a sad and lonely child; the wooden horse she sees in a junk shop is sad and lonely too, and needs a home. Nabb's book is a superb internalised dialogue, a modern fairytale in which the horse comes alive and liberates Irina from the burden of her sadness. Seven upward. In a different vein, Nabb has written a very enjoyable series of stories about a funny, feisty little girl called Josie Smith (Collins, £3.99). Heart-warming without being twee. Six upward.

**The Hundred-Mile-An-Hour Dog by Jeremy Strong
(Puffin, £3.99)**

A Children's Book Award winner that tells about Streaker, a rocket on four legs with a woof attached. Children giggle uncontrollably at the humour, and it will raise a smile in mums and dads as well. Seven upward. Strong is prolific, although the quality of his work is variable, and confident seven-year-old readers will love Lightning Lucy (Puffin, £3.99) about a little girl who can fly, a sort of miniature Wonderwoman.

**Snow White and the Seven Aliens by Laurence Anholt
(Orchard, £3.99)**

A seriously silly retelling of the story in which Snow White is a wannabe pop star who has to defeat the mean queen, who was once the lead singer with The Wonderful Witched Witches. Parents may sigh, but children find it hilarious. Great pictures.

The Worst Witch by Jill Murphy (Puffin, £3.99)

This is the place where for most little girls real reading begins. Few can resist Mildred Hubble, the little witch at Miss Cackle's academy who is always crashing her broomstick and getting her spells wrong. Much copied but not bettered. There are three more.

Mr Majeika by Humphrey Carpenter (Puffin, £3.99)

First in a witty series about class three, who get a bit of a shock when their new teacher does not enter by the door but flies in through the window. But then, Mr Majeika is a wizard, albeit one for whom things are always going wrong. Not much sub-text, but real page turners and plenty of other tales the series to satisfy ravenous readers.

Bill's New Frock by Anne Fine (Mammoth, £3.99)

When Bill Simpson wakes up one Monday morning he finds he is a girl, and his mum packs him off to school in a frilly pink frock. So begins one of the worst days of his life. A gender-bending fable that is a great feminist romp for the over-sevens.

The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish by Neil Gaiman, illustrated by Dave McKean (Bloomsbury, £12.99)



A bittersweet, guffaw-out-loud story from the most distinctive partnership in picture books today. Features their trademark detached parents - dad is central to the story but is so immersed in his newspaper it all just happens around him, while mum takes three pages to notice her daughter's mouth is gagged. Don't miss the afterword.

Once Upon A Poem, edited by Barry Cunningham (The Chicken House, £14.99)

Children's authors select their favourite poems; an A-list gathering, which only The Chicken House's editor, Barry Cunningham, could summon up with such aplomb. There are famous names, and some unexpected ones too, giving their revealing choices. JK Rowling picks one about a boy who is eaten.



Boing! by Sean Taylor (Walker Books, £10.99)

While his young son watches television, the Great Elastic Marvel, five times world trampolining champion, is practising the deadly difficult quadruple, headfirst flip. Practising so hard he falls out of the window, and begins a series of death-defying leaps round the neighbourhood, lively exclamations as he goes. Buoyant text, exuberant drawings.

How to Catch a Star by Oliver Jeffers (HarperCollins, £10.99)



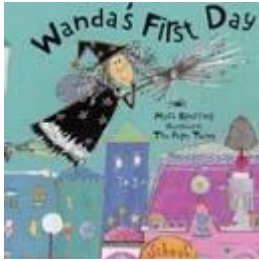
A beautifully told, beautifully painted story about reaching for the stars. The little boy loves star-gazing so much he wants to hold a star of his own. It's a scheme made for disappointment, but after setbacks, he does succeed. Jeffers' story-telling satisfies while still leaving room for a child's own imagination to decide what actually happened.

Is It Because? by Tony Ross (Andersen Press, £9.99)



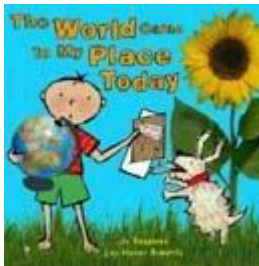
The latest from the author of the I Want my Potty series is a book about bullying. The central character is a young boy who is being picked on by a certain Peregrine Ffrogg. Fortunately, he has an ally in a clever dog, whom he asks all the questions about why these horrible things are happening to him. Brightly coloured characters on pale watercolour backgrounds act out all the boy's musings about the bully. If only the ending were true - that the bully's victim always comes out confident and on top. But still, this is a book that even the very small will understand, and all will appreciate the flights of imagining.

Wanda's First Day by Mark Sperring (Chicken House, £10.99)



Wanda is off to school for the first time, complete with slimy lunchbox. She wears black and rides a broomstick. When she gets to the classroom, she finds that everyone else is wearing pretty dresses and has gossamer wings. Her spells turn out differently from theirs too - larger, uglier. Wanda asks Miss Dewdrop, the teacher, whether she is in the right class, a worry further compounded when a class of witches go past with one fairy in their midst. "Do you like it here, Wanda?" asks Miss Dewdrop. When Wanda says yes, her teacher replies that is all that is needed to belong. Sparkly drawings for a happy story.

The World Came to My Place Today by Jo Redman, illustrated by Ley Honor Roberts (Eden Project, £10.99)

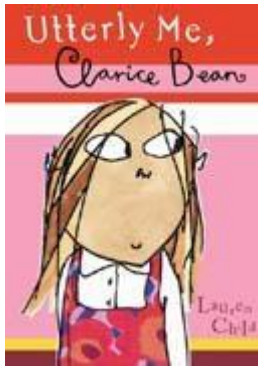


Not a novel, but a wonderfully imaginative book which shows children how their everyday environment connects with the wider world. When George's little sister gets chickenpox, he can't go out to play and wishes that the world could visit him. Grandpa points out that it already has, showing George the rice in his cereal that hails from China, the oranges in his juice that came from Spain, and the newspaper that is made out of Canadian trees. Mingling its narrative with an entertaining geography lesson, this is part activity book and part storybook. The appealing drawings are cleverly mixed, collage-style, with photo-graphs. An original, enjoyable book that performs the conjuring trick of making the world seem at once bigger and smaller than it really is.

Moonthief by Roger McGough, illustrated by Penny Dann (Kingfisher, £9.99)

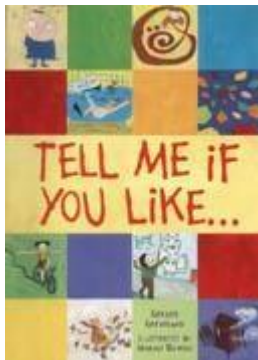
"Look there's a new moon out tonight," says Bobby bear to his sweetheart Betty. "I wonder what they did with the old one," replies Betty. This is a book for anyone who has ever had the same thought. It is slightly mad and whimsical, but then it is written by that master of the daft and improbable, Roger McGough. Bobby comes up with all sorts of ideas about what you could do with the moon if you crept up into the sky and stole it away when no one was looking. This "moonthief" reckons it would be great for housing a goldfish, for use as a Frisbee or for tenpin bowling. The saccharine ending aside, this is a thoroughly enjoyable piece of moonshine. The five-year-old I tried it on had no objections at all and loved the charming illustrations.

Utterly Me, Clarice Bean by Lauren Child (Orchard Books, £8.99)



Lauren Child is a star in the picture-book market and plenty of children will already know Clarice Bean, her off-the-wall heroine for the under-eights. Now Child has written a full-length story about Clarice and her obsession with detective novels, an obsession that proves useful when strange things start happening, the school homework project competition is announced and her best friend disappears. Although this longer novel is very welcome, with fewer pictures, the charm of our heroine is somewhat diminished and it is perhaps Child's misfortune to be publishing at a time when there is already a glut of books for this age group featuring ditsy Bridget Jones-style eight-year-olds. But for a few good belly laughs, Clarice Bean wins hands down every time.

Tell Me If You Like . . . by Gerard Greverand, illus Magali Bardos (Pavillion, £10.99)



This one will tickle the fancy of adults as well as kids. As is so often the case with the best children's books, it is based on a very simple idea. It takes the form of a series of questions: Tell me if you like wobbling a loose tooth with your tongue? Tell me if you like rummaging about in your nose for the biggest bogey? Tell me if you like smelling the warm, wet road after a storm? There is literally page after page in this vein, ranging from the lyrical to the downright silly and even the philosophical - with witty illustrations that amply assist in jogging the memory banks. It whisked me straight back to my own childhood thoughts, sensations and experiences, and also gripped the imagination of my seven-year-old who was inspired to start compiling her own lists of likes.

Beware of Girls by Tony Blundell (Penguin, £4.99)

A long time ago, Tony Blundell wrote a very entertaining book called Beware of Boys. This follow-up is just as sharp and funny, and offers an enjoyable spin on the Little Red Riding Hood story for those of us who always thought that Little Red Riding Hood was nice but rather dim (fancy not knowing your granny from a wolf in drag).

This little girl is definitely the smartest child in the forest, so when the big bad wolf reads a book about little girls and grandmas and finds that the pictures make him very hungry indeed, he is outwitted and defeated before you can say "snack on legs".

Blundell's pictures are as witty as his text, and this version of the traditional tale, with its very modern heroine, will delight young readers - even boys and maybe even wolves.

Looking After Murphy by Jamie Rix, illustrated by John Bendall-Brunello (Hodder, £4.99)

Sally and Jim are not at all sure about their Granny Lally. Can it really be the case that the cream is sour so they shouldn't touch it, particularly when Granny Lally looks like the cat that got the cream? And would her doctor really order her to watch at least an hour of Celebrity Knitting every day? When Granny is asked to look after the children's hamster and he runs away, she learns that the truth may be painful - but is better in the long run. Trying to pass off another hamster from the pet shop doesn't work at all.

Jamie Rix's simple story broaches the difficult subjects of lying and lost pets (both of which give parents sleepless nights) with humour and enough ambiguity to make sure that this engaging tale is always a story and never a tract.

Man on the Moon (a day in the life of Bob) by Simon Bartram (Templar, £9.95)

This book is as irresistible to parents as it is to young boys. It shows great humour as it tells the story of Bob who has the job of being the man in the moon. Well, when you think about it, someone has got to do the job. So why not Bob, who when he isn't in his spacesuit for the journey to and from work wears a Fair Isle sweater and lives in a house just like you and me?

In fact, Bob is such a down-to-earth bloke that he refuses to believe in aliens. Silly man. You and I, the readers, know aliens exist because they keep popping up on the pages, just out of Bob's view or when he's got his back turned to vacuum the moon. Anyone who liked Toy Story will fall for Bob, for Bartram's artlessly clever prose and the big, bold, wonderfully-detailed illustrations.

Jethro Byrde, Fairy Child by Bob Graham (Walker, £10.99)

Most books that have anything to do with fairies bring me out in a rash. They so often seem to have been written in icing sugar. This one by Australian writer Bob Graham, who won the 2000 Smarties Gold Prize for Max is different, very different. In fact, mixed up in here with the story of the fairy travellers who Annabelle finds among the cement and weeds, is a very entertaining fable about tolerance of difference. Even the fairy folk travellers defy all stereotype. They sell hot dogs and hamburgers.

Graham's books bubble with good humour and the knowledge that there are many ways of looking at the world provided you keep an open mind. The drawings make much of perspective and are cleverly mixed into the text, almost comic book-style, for variety.

The Quigleys by Simon Mason (David Fickling, £10.99)

A proper little novel for small people, Mason's book takes the form of four interlinking stories about the Quigley family: mum (always tired), dad (a bit useless), son Will and daughter Lucy. Each chapter concentrates on one member of the family.

The first about dad's inadequacies as a babysitter is the weakest in the collection. But the others are a giggle, providing wonderful snapshots of the chaos and joys of family life, all the ups and downs - including mum's birthday celebration and Lucy's determination to dress as a bee when a bridesmaid. Mason's prose is gently humorous, but he also gets at the often-unspoken truth of family life: that what can go wrong will go wrong, and that however much you plan, things seldom turn out as you expect.

Lily's Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Hanks (Hodder, £4.99)

If you have a child starting school in September, rush out and buy this book at once. If you already have a child in infants, it will make a brilliant end-of-term present for their teacher. It has an exuberant heart that beats with sheer joy about the pleasures of school and inspirational teachers.

Lily loves everything about school and particularly her teacher Mr Slinger, who is her hero. But when she is given a beautiful purple plastic purse, she is so keen to show it off to the class that she gets in to trouble. Will it be the end of a beautiful relationship?

There is one thing wrong with this book: the print is so small, it is hard for early readers to tackle alone. Otherwise, everything about it is just so perfect you will share it again and again.

Six Storey House by Geraldine McCaughrean (Hodder, £7.99)

It is great to come across a novel written for this age group that feels like a proper book rather than an extension of a school-reading scheme. Constructed like a literary version of one of those cross-section books that show you the interior workings of a building, Geraldine McCaughrean's quirky story gets to the emotional heart of a big old house and, more particularly, the people who live there. Among the motley crew of engaging residents are lonely Dexi, whose single mother is always at work; Widow Shoo, who is so distracted by her washing that she hangs the baby on the line; and Mr Tring, the composer who has lost his tune. A modern fairytale where "can't" becomes "can" and the six-storey house is transformed into seven, this is a delicately written tale for children just embarking on books with chapters.

The Adventures of a Nose by Viviane Schwarz, illustrated by Joel Stewart (Walker, £10.99)

This is a really original and quirky story about a nose. A nose? Yes, a nose that is looking for its place in the world, where it can "fit in and really stick out". The quest is a long one and requires journeys to places that are cold and tingly, hot and spicy - and visits to the library and doctor. I shall long treasure the image of the Nose lying on the psychiatrist's couch. The great thing about this is that it is more than a one-joke story and works on several different levels. On one hand it is a fable about being yourself and finding your place in the world, and on the other hand it makes the reader think about the functions of the nose. It is a very clever book - and enormous fun.

Claydon Was a Clingy Child by Cressida Cowell (Hodder, £9.99)

Claydon will not let go of his mother's leg. He is convinced that it is safer that way. So wherever mummy goes, Claydon goes too, even though mum is a dangerous-sports enthusiast and spends her days skateboarding, sky-diving and playing rugby. Soon Claydon's terrified teddy is pointing out that although mum is "an excellent person in many respects she is also - and I mean this nicely - a maniac", and that Claydon would be much safer playing on his tricycle. What teddy doesn't bank on is that a taste for deathdefying feats obviously runs in the family. Perfect for the clingy child, or indeed anyone of any age who is suffering from separation anxiety, Cowell's book is a stereotypebusting, laugh-aloud delight that bursts with life and colour while offering gentle reassurance.

The Kiss That Missed by David Melling (Hodder, £10.99)

You are probably right to be suspicious of any children's book that is aimed at the St Valentine's market, as so often these stories are really for adults who have never grown up. But it is worth making an exception for this wonderfully comic little charmer. Melling has fairytale fun with the story of a bedtime kiss that is blown by the king to his son that misses and bounces out of the window and into the night. Instead of "follow that taxi", it is a case of "follow that kiss", a job entrusted to the accident-prone loyal knight who soon finds himself in the wood where there are "wild creatures with wild eyes, too much hair and very bad manners". There is plenty more in this vein, and a dragon besides, but eventually it is happy ever after. Melling's illustrations are as snazzy and snappy as his prose - and it's fine to be reminded that bedtime rituals cannot be hurried.

All Your Own Teeth by Adrienne Geoghegan, illustrated by Cathy Gale (Bloomsbury, £9.99)

Stuart lives in the city and is determined to be an artist. When he has painted everything the city has to offer, he sets off to the jungle in search of wild animals. He puts up a sign: "Wanted: Hansum wild animal to sit still for painting. Must have all your own teeth and a nice big smile." But Stuart has never seen a wild animal before and he thinks that the elephant's trunk is ugly, the cheetah is far too spotty and the hippo looks like a chocolate pudding. Geoghegan's story, illustrated with zany comic gusto, will make both parents and children laugh out loud, not least because it has a nasty twist worthy of Roald Dahl. A very enjoyable bedtime snack and a useful reminder that it is never wise to insult a crocodile's friends.

Slow Loris by Alexis Deacon (Hutchinson, £10.99)

This is a really thrilling debut from young writer-illustrator Alexis Deacon. Its originality jumps out of the covers. Slow Loris lives in the zoo and everybody, including the visitors and the other animals, thinks that he is really boring because he does everything so slowly. What they don't know is that, at night, when they are all asleep, he is really fast. When his secret gets out, soon all the animals are enjoying a wild nocturnal life. Most illustrations for the young are bright and breezy; in contrast, Deacon's drawings are dark, murky, full of detail and totally compelling. While Slow Loris going fast is a blur, all the humans in the zoo look sleepy or bored. This is off the wall and sly in a way that books for this age group aren't supposed to be.

**Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll,
illustrated by Helen Oxenbury (Walker, £14.99)**



A very modern "Alice" for the modern child that dusts off the Victorian fustiness of the book. Some adults will regret this approach and the passing of the dark Tenniel drawings but this is a perfect introduction to the story for younger readers and while Oxenbury's fresh as a daisy illustrations make the story completely accessible they certainly don't Disneyfy it in any way.

**Rumpelstiltskin and Other Grimm Tales by Carol Ann
Duffy, illustrated by Marketa Prachaticka (Faber,
£8.99)**

These are familiar stories such as Snow White, Ashputtel and Little Redcap told with a poet's voice. They are bare, spare, and stripped down to the bone so that the story itself stands out like a skeleton. It was Duffy's versions of the tales that were used by the Young Vic for its outstanding Grimm Tales. Reading the stories makes you aware how much the theatrical style sprung from Duffy's gleaming, hard words.

**The Indian in the Cupboard by Lynne Reid Banks
(Collins Modern Classics, £5.99)**

On his ninth birthday, Omri receives many gifts including a much-wanted skateboard. Less desired are the old cupboard given to him by his brother and the three-inch tall plastic Indian given to him by his friend Patrick. But it is the latter two gifts that prove best of all for when the Indian is put in the cupboard and the key is turned he comes to life. Little Bull turns out to be everything you could wish from an Indian - proud, fearless and defiant. But as Omri soon discovers being responsible for another person isn't easy, particularly when they don't always behave as you might expect or wish. This is a wonderful, very readable book in which our responsibilities to each other are explored through an entertaining story.

The Children of Green Knowe by Lucy Boston (Faber, £4.99)

Tolly's great grandmother's house is full of a very special kind of magic. There are other children living there, children who were happy there many centuries before. Boston's novel really does conjure up all the magic of childhood for a new generation in this smart reissue of the 1961 Carnegie winner.

Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats by TS Eliot, illustrated by Edward Gorey (Faber, £9.99)

Essential for reading out loud as a family, TS Eliot's felines are a wonderfully mysterious capricious and amusing group of must-have moggies. Cult American artist Edward Gorey adds more mischief with his illustrations.

Pippi Longstocking by Astrid Lindgren (Puffin, £4.99)

Just when you're feeling down, the homework is piling up and life seems a grind and not fun, you need a dose of Pippi Longstocking, the irrepressible little girl who doesn't live by the rules and creates a wonderful fantasy world for herself and her friends. This is a marvellous, stimulating book that is brilliant for children who've had the individuality bashed out of them by school.

The Water Babies by Charles Kingsley (Puffin, £3.99)

Abridged - and all the better for it - version of the classic Victorian tale of chimney sweeps featuring Mrs Do As You Would Be Done By and other morality figures. Of course it is stiff and old-fashioned, but there is also a kind of enchantment about it that survives changes in life and attitudes.

Please Mrs Butler by Allan Ahlberg (Puffin, £3.99)



A child's school day told in verse through from going to school to bedtime. That doesn't make it sound all that interesting, but Ahlberg's easy-to-read poems are funny, sad and absolutely accurate when it comes to emotion. From the title poem about a teacher at the end of her tether, through the pinickety parent complaining about her son's lost possessions to the quietly devastating Small Quarrel, this is a brilliant collection that not only makes children love poetry but gets them writing their own.

The Haunting by Margaret Mahy (Puffin, £4.99)

Carnegie award-winning novel about Barney who one "ordinary Wednesday" finds that "the world tilted and ran downhill in all directions." Barney is being haunted but who is making the insistent ghostly footsteps in his mind? And why do his sisters' attempts to unravel the mystery lead to a crisis that almost topples the entire family? Mahy's attractively simple storytelling style will attract even the most reluctant readers and creates a convincing portrait of a family tipped out of kilter by the keeping of secrets.

Thunder and Lightnings by Jan Mark (Puffin, £4.99)

Victor was the oddest boy Andrew had ever met. How could he be so dim in school, and yet know so much about aeroplanes? But then, as Andrew starts to slowly appreciate, appearances can be very deceptive indeed and we all have our own strategies for survival.

Smartly written, very enjoyable story about friendship and the differences between us all. Particularly good for boys.

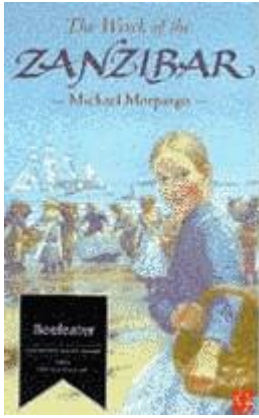
The Snow Spider by Jenny Nimmo (Mammoth, £4.99)

Gwyn's granny gives him five strange birthday gifts including a twisted metal brooch. Gwyn gives the brooch to the wind and in return is sent the snow spider who weaves a silken web. Inside the web sits a girl who Gwyn knows but cannot place. Nimmo's book deftly mixes magic and mourning, the ordinary and the other-worldly in this story of a lost sister, a battle of good against evil and the value of knowing the place where you belong.

The House of Rats by Stephen Elboz (OUP, £3.99)

Elboz is one of the best writers around at the moment, crafting his stories with amazing depth and using words with wit and brilliance. This 1992 Smarties Award winner tells of four children who suddenly find their safe life disappearing as the mysterious house where they are living is taken over and wolves howl outside. Only when they meet one of the "Rats" do they find a way to escape.

The Wreck of the Zanzibar by Michael Morpurgo (Mammoth, £4.50)



It is 1907, life on the Scilly Isles is bleak and difficult and it seems likely that Laura and her father will be forced to retreat to the mainland. Even the cow stops milking. Morpurgo's book is written with his customary quiet authority as it charts the battle between man and nature and the cruelties and beauties of the sea and its creatures.

A Dog So Small by Phillipa Pearce (Puffin, £4.99)

The longing, the sadness, the sense of otherness and the exhilaration of childhood are brought vividly to life in this story of Ben, a boy who so much wants a dog he conjures one up out of his imagination.

The Mouse and His Child by Russell Hoban (Faber, £4.99)

Russell Hoban's book is a brilliant modern fairytale about a father and son toy mouse who dance under a Christmas tree until they break the ancient clockwork rules and are themselves broken. Discarded, they are rescued from a dustbin and repaired by a tramp before setting out on a dangerous quest to find a home of their own. A crackling read, full of Hoban's sly humour and his belief in the importance of having a place of your own and being happy.

The Finders by Nigel Hinton (Puffin, £3.99)

Walking across the park one morning, Rosie encounters a frail old man who asks her to post a package for him. Little does our heroine know that it contains the Djinn star whose evil magic threatens to take her over. Only the Finders can help her. Hinton's book, a pacy, well-plotted novel is a really good introduction to more adult reading for nine year olds and above.

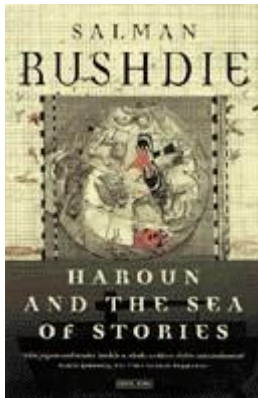
The Illustrated Mum by Jacqueline Wilson (Corgi, £3.99)

Wilson's best book to date is a no-holds bar account of the mental breakdown of Marigold, mother to Star and Dolphin and covered from head to toe in tattoos. For years the girls have persuaded themselves that life with mum is a gas (except when she goes weird) but now they are growing up and looking at the world and mum with new eyes. This is a wonderful, perceptive and disturbing book about mental illness, irresponsible parenthood and the falling out of love of children with their parents. Wilson holds true to the very end, offering no happy-ever-afters but plenty of possibilities instead.

King of the Shadows by Susan Cooper (Puffin, £4.99)

Shakespeare's London is brought vividly to life in cleverly written novel that sees young actor Nat Field slipping back 400 years in time to find himself playing Puck at the Globe Theatre in 1599. Playing opposite him is the King of the Shadows himself, William Shakespeare. Worth a hundred history lessons, Cooper's novel combines thriller-like suspense with a story of theatrical and personal transformations.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories by Salman Rushdie (Granta, £6.99)



Think the Arabian Nights. Think Alice in Wonderland. Think Star Wars. You can think a lot about Rushdie's story about a boy's quest to restore the gift of storytelling to his father, but you'll probably be too busy enjoying it. This is a dense, fantastical book, in which the comic rubs shoulders with evil and the savage with the lyrical. Lovely.

The Wizard of Earthsea by Ursula Le Guin (Puffin, £4.99)

The first book in Le Guin's deep, dense and utterly brilliant Earthsea series, a fantasy sequence that is to Terry Pratchett what double cream is to skim milk. Le Guin writes

with a calm authority, almost a stillness, as she charts the story of the young wizard Sparrowhawk who misuses magic and unleashes an evil shadow-beast who threatens his land. Only Sparrowhawk can destroy it, but the journey is long and difficult and takes him to the farthest corner of Earthsea.

The Rinaldi Ring by Jenny Nimmo (Mammoth £4.99)

Eliot is finding it hard to come to terms with his mother's death. But then he finds a ghost in his bedroom who has her own grief to deal with. Nimmo's beautifully written and understated novel is about the way the past makes its imprint upon the present and the subtle interconnections of both history and family relationships.

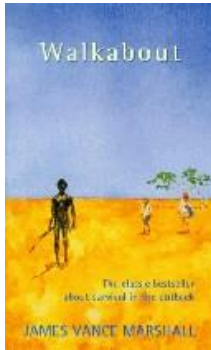
A Voyage of Discovery 1: From the Land of the Amazons to the Indigo Isles by Francois Place (Pavillion, £12.99)

Francois Place is an artist, an author, a dreamer and the inventor of strange, fantastical countries and legends that he realises through fly-away prose and exquisite pen pictures. It is like being taken on an amazing off-beat adventure by a 19th century explorer. This is a must-have book for the dreamer in every child, a book to awaken curiosity and the imagination.

The Ghost Drum by Susan Price (Faber £3.50)

Imagine a country where night lasted an entire winter and where in the darkness danger stalks. Price conjures a world of magic and danger to tell this modern, mythic fairytale about a boy imprisoned in a tower whose cries for help are heard by the witch-girl, Chingis. If they like this try the equally enthralling Ghost Dance and Ghost Song.

Walkabout by James Vance Marshall (Puffin, £3.99)



A culture clash of epic proportions ensues in this classic novel that sees two privileged English kids abandoned in the Australian outback and forced to fend for themselves.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl (Puffin Modern Classic, £5.99)

Truly scrumptious tale of a boy called Charlie Bucket who wins a golden ticket, entitling him to a day out at Willy Wonka's miraculous chocolate factory. The real question about this book is how long you'll be able to hold off before reading it to your kids. Dahl's wonderfully evil sense of humour makes what could simply be a modern version of the cautionary tale into something exceptional. The writing sizzles, foams, spits and bubbles over. Wild and wonderful. Read it to them from six; read it alone from eight. Follow with Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator, James and the Giant Peach and the BFG (all Puffin £5.99)

The Earth Giant by Melvin Burgess (Puffin, £3.99)

As a great storm rages around their house, Amy and Peter hear a terrible noise like a dying giant. Amy knows that the sound is an ancient oak tree half a mile away being ripped from the ground. Trapped among its roots is a secret that only she can uncover. Beautifully wrought story about the way secrets bring you together and tear you apart, and about the competitive relationship between a brother and sister from a fine writer best known for his brilliant books for teenagers.

Woof! By Allan Ahlberg (Puffin, £4.99)

Highly entertaining book about Eric, a perfectly ordinary boy, who feels his nose becoming cold and wet and his ears becoming floppy as he is transformed into a dog. In its own schoolboyish way Eric's transformation is just as interesting and surreal as that of poor Gregor Samsa into a beetle.

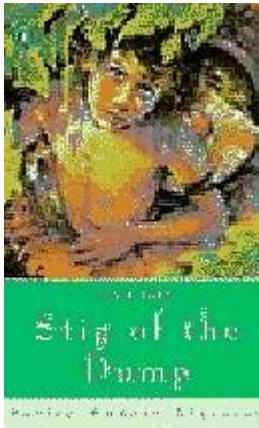
Matilda by Roald Dahl (Puffin, £4.99)

The Roald Dahl must-read for this age-group; they'll find it impossible to resist even if they are hooked on the Danny Devito film version. In fact, seeing the film leads naturally into wanting to read the story of the remarkable Matilda, ignored and derided by her parents and bullied by the odious teacher Miss Trunchbull, who not only has a brilliant mind but strange kinetic powers. A brilliant, empowering book that shows children that they don't have to be helpless even in the face of the most bullying of adults.

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett (Puffin, £2.99)

Wonderful story about the disagreeable Mary Lennox who, after her parents die, is brought back from India to live in her uncle's great lonely house on the moors. Hodgson Burnett captures the fury of being a helpless, lonely child that makes both Mary and the invalid Colin behave badly. But neither it nor Hodgson Burnett's other classic *A Little Princess* (Puffin, £2.99) are particularly easy reads. Eight-year-olds are likely to get frustrated by the sentence construction. Either read it to them or wait a couple of years.

Stig of the Dump by Clive King (Puffin, £5.99)



Modern environmentally and health-conscious youngsters might eye the fox hunting and smoking with horror. But this story of Barney, a small boy who makes friends with a strange, Stone Age type boy he finds living in the local quarry, is enormously appealing. A really rollicking straightforward read that celebrates a strange friendship and the way two are better than one when it comes to taking on the bullies. Stig's puzzlement at the modern way of life makes the reader look at the world from a slightly different perspective.

Ballet Shoes by Noel Streatfield (Puffin Modern Classics, £5.99)

Adopted as babies by Great Uncle Matthew, Pauline, Petrova and Posy lead a sheltered life until Great Uncle's disappearance leads to money troubles. The girls are enrolled in

stage school so they will be able to earn a living. It all seems slightly quaint now, but Streatfield's characterisations are wonderfully vivid, the writing straightforward and honest and the narrative a page-turner. Quite delightful and infinitely more real than all those titles currently being churned out for ballet-mad little girls.

Mary Poppins by PL Travers (Collins, £5.99)

No spoonfuls of sugar are necessary to help this classic tale slip down. Jane and Michael's new nanny turns out to be the intimidating Mary Poppins, who brings a little magic into the lives of children in the Edwardian middle classes' equivalent of "care"

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone by JK Rowling (Bloomsbury, £4.99)

Yes, the Harry Potter books are derivative and hierarchical, but Rowling's a genuinely witty writer with a terrific gift for naming things: one of the great pleasures of these books is the way they present the wizarding world as a parallel universe to that of us poor muggles. What's more, they are real page-turners and appeal to boys and girls equally. The second in the series, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, is the weakest; the third, The Prisoner of Azkaban the best, not least because the Dementors are so truly terrifying. But these kinds of arguments are academic: I've yet to meet a child who is resistant and plenty of adults find them just as spellbinding. Eight upward, but younger brothers and sisters are liable to get in on the act earlier, particularly if you read it to them. There is also a really good unabridged audiocassette version of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (Cover to Cover, £19.99) read by Stephen Fry. It runs to 8hours and 23minutes, which sure beats nine hours of I Spy.

Lizzie Dripping by Helen Cresswell (Puffin, £3.99)

Written in 1973, Cresswell's stories about life in a small Welsh village where Lizzie wanders the streets with her head in the clouds seem almost to come from another century. But while village life has changed out of all recognition, the emotions of Lizzie, who wants something exciting to happen in her life, who loves her soft dad and rather severe mum but keeps getting into scrapes and who meets a witch in the way other people run into the milkman, remain as fresh as a daisy.

The Little White Horse by Elizabeth Goodge (OUP, £4.99)

A touch of romance and a shiver of fear are to be found in this 1946 Carnegie Medalwinning fantasy, set in the beautiful valley of Moonacre where the moon princess

once ruled. Old-fashioned, but there is toughness beneath the whimsy. More for the girls than the boys.

The Borrowers by Mary Norton (Puffin Modern Classics, £5.99)

A classic that doesn't reduce the world - on the contrary, it opens it up - but which does view it from a child-sized perspective. It tells the story of a family of little people who live beneath the floorboards and borrow from "human beans" who don't even know they exist - until the young Arietty makes friends with "the boy upstairs". There is nothing in the slightest bit twee about it. Norton writes brilliantly, viewing the world as if through the eyes of her little people with a sense of wonder and terror. Even children who are addicts of the excellent but bastardised film version and the superb BBC serial version will gobble this up on the printed page.

Stonestruck by Helen Cresswell (Puffin £4.99)

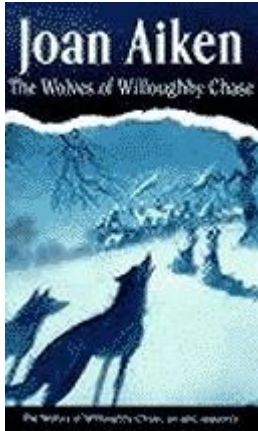
Jessica loses her house in the blitz and is evacuated before the rest of her school to a huge Welsh castle with only the gardener and housekeeper for company. But she is not alone; the castle grounds are full of other mysterious presences including a ghostly boy, a sinister green lady, a screeching peacock and chains of desperate "stonestruck" children, engaged in a deadly game of tag with Jessica as the quarry. Cresswell writes with a spare, dense poetry about the desolation of separation, the isolating effect of unhappiness and the need to take care about what you wish. A really spellbinding piece of grown-up writing for children that makes the Goosebumps series pale into insignificance. Children who enjoy this will also devour Cresswell's Moondial (Puffin, £4.99). It can be read alone at 10 upward, but both are very satisfying for adults to read to the 8-upward age range. In a different vein, but just as good, is Cresswell's Snatchers - the story of a girl whose guardian angel appears in the local park to protect her from the Land of the Starless Night. Liable to engender plenty of hilarious discussion about whether angels have belly buttons.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (Collins, £3.99)

Yes, yes, we know. Ridiculously middle-class and old-fashioned and full of Christian imagery, the triumph of good over evil and being a jolly good sort. But really it is magic, provided you take care not to force it down your children's throats too early. Some of the sentence structure is quite difficult and you really need to be eight upward and a

confident reader not to be put off. But it's like getting into the wardrobe in the first place: a bit tricky, but once you've made it through the door, utterly transforming. Of course this isn't actually the first in the series - *The Magician's Nephew* is - but this is where you should begin.

The Wolves of Willoughby Chase by Joan Aiken (Red Fox, £3.99)



Joan Aiken's classic adventure story is set during the imaginary reign of James III in the early part of the 19th century when the recently completed channel tunnel has allowed wolves to overrun large parts of Britain. A really rollicking story, with plenty of wild flights of the imagination, it has the essential ingredients of lost parents, an evil governess and two feisty cousins, Bonnie and Sylvia, determined to evade the clutches of the evil Miss Slighcarp. The good news for those with keen readers is that there are more than a dozen books in the Willoughby Chase sequence. The bad news is that although featuring the memorably stropy heroine Dido Twite, some of the subsequent novels are off-puttingly obscure.

The Boggart by Susan Cooper (Puffin, £4.99)

Funny and tender storytelling from the excellent Susan Cooper. This one is about a boggart that is accidentally transported from his remote Scottish island to the bright lights of Toronto, and doesn't like it one bit. Bad-tempered things, boggarts.

The Peppermint Pig by Nina Bawden (Puffin, £4.99)

Life seemed grim when father lost his job and the family had to move to their aunt's home. But with the arrival of Johnnie the pig, things begin to improve. Really enjoyable story from a fine writer whose other books include the excellent *Carrie's War* (Puffin, £4.99), about wartime evacuees, and *Granny the Pag* (Puffin, £4.99), an enjoyable read about an unconventional Gran and her strong-minded granddaughter.

Five Children and It by E Nesbit (Puffin, £3.99)

Childhood is somehow golden in E Nesbit's stories about a family of children who discover a Psammead or sand fairy, a grumpy and very ancient creature that can give them wishes. The difficulty is of thinking of really good wishes and not getting things that they really don't want at all, and even the simplest of wishes seem to get them into great difficulties. This book is such fun that children want to gobble it down in one sitting

and are absolutely amazed when you tell them it was written almost a century ago. It seems so fresh because it gets to the very heart of being a child - the wonderful sense that anything can happen to you and probably will. The adventures continue with *The Story of the Amulet* and *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (both Puffin, £3.99).

Double Act by Jacqueline Wilson (Corgi Yearling, £3.99)

To the average nine-year-old girl, Jacqueline Wilson's books are as desirable as a trip to Claire's Accessories and a pair of the latest fringed jeans. This story of ten-year-old identical twins Ruby and Garnet, who lose their mother and have to come to terms not only with their dad's new love but also with growing up and growing apart, is a model of Wilson's exuberant and confessional storytelling style, in which Ruby and Garnet take it in turns to tell the story. Wilson's books can be too obviously issue-driven to be really satisfying, but they are a stepping-stone into a real world where real kids face tough emotional problems. Plenty to choose from: we'd also recommend *The Bed and Breakfast Star*, *The Story of Tracy Beaker* and *The Lottie Project* (all Corgi Yearling, £3.99).

Watership Down by Richard Adams (Puffin, £5.99)

Join Hazel and his brave band of rabbits as they set out in search of a new home. Richard Adams's modern classic is not fluffy or cute at all. In fact, it's so good that you completely forget after a while that we're talking rabbits, not humans.

The Runaways by Ruth Thomas (Red Fox, £3.99)

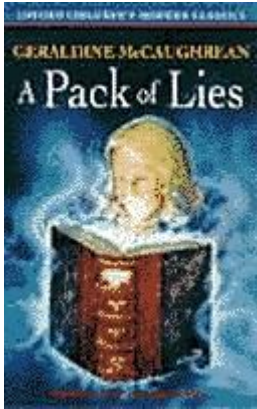
It is two children against the rest of the world in Thomas's riveting tale about Julia and Nathan, who win popularity at school when they find a stash of money in a deserted house, but soon decide to flee when teachers and parents want to know where it came from. Thomas writes from a child's point of view about what it feels like not to have a special friend and never to be picked when teams are being sorted. The unlikely friendship between Julia and Nathan is drawn with a delicacy that never ignores its difficulties and the final triumphant realisation that love is worth having is exhilarating.

Clockwork by Philip Pullman (Corgi Yearling, £3.99)

Macabre is the only word for Pullman's wonderfully creepy tale that, needless to say, runs like clockwork. In a way it is a parable about the power of storytelling itself. But it is also part fairytale, part ghost story and part science fiction; Pullman writes with a deceptive simplicity that makes the whole thing feel both ancient and very modern at the same time. There are some wonderfully witty picture asides, but it is the narrative that really winds you up: a creepy tale in which a lazy apprentice clockmaker gets his

comeuppance and a story being told on a dark winter's night suddenly takes on a sinister life of its own. If families still did that kind of thing, this would be the perfect novel to be read out loud around the fire. While roasting chestnuts, of course. Short enough to tempt even reluctant readers in the 9 upward age range, although those of a nervous disposition should probably wait a year or so or try Pullman's superb feminist adventure story, *The Firework-Maker's Daughter* (Corgi Yearling, £3.99).

A Pack of Lies by Geraldine McCaughton (OUP, £3.99)



Cleverly structured and wittily told series of stories that combine to make one satisfying whole as they tell of Ailsa, who sees the truth behind the yarns spun by the mysterious man who helps out in her mum's antique shop.

Tom's Midnight Garden by Philippa Pearce (Puffin, £4.99)

I still can't pass a grandfather clock without thinking of this book, so strong an impression did this haunting story make on me as a child. Pearce's writing sends a shiver of both excitement and fear up the spine in this clever double time-framed story about Tom who, when the clock strikes 13, can see his aunt's house just as it was 50 years ago. Slightly younger readers will enjoy Pearce's *A Dog So Small* (Puffin £4.99), about a boy who so longs for a dog that he conjures one up from his imagination.

What Katy Did by Susan Coolidge (Puffin, £3.99)

North American classic about the irrepressible Katy who courts disaster and only starts to really grow up after she is paralysed in a fall from a swing.

The Silver Sword by Ian Serraillier (Puffin, £5.99)

Based on a true story, Serraillier's book doesn't flinch in recounting the adventures of four children as they struggle to stay alive in Nazi-occupied Europe and their desperate, epic journey from Poland to Switzerland in search of their parents.

Skellig by David Almond (Hodder, £4.99)

"A story of love and faith, written with exquisite, heart-fluttering tenderness. It is an extraordinarily profound book, no matter what the age of the reader," was the verdict of the Whitbread judges who gave this the Children's Book of the Year Award. You can't disagree. An instant modern classic.

The Guardians by John Christopher (Puffin, £4.99)



Engrossing Guardian Award-winner from the early 1970s and set in the near future, which is nearer now than it was then. It is an atmospheric tale about Rob, on the run after the mysterious death of his dad, who crosses The Barrier and finds himself in a countryside that initially seems idyllic. So why is rebellion in the air?

The Tulip Touch by Ann Fine (Puffin £4.99)

Friendship proves dangerous in Fine's uncomfortable and genuinely powerful novel that carries with it echoes of the Jamie Bulger case. Natalie is attracted to the difficult, disturbed Tulip, perhaps because she seems so dangerous. But soon she is out of her depth as Tulip's games get increasingly out of control. Plenty of control, though, in Fine's delicate exploration of friendship, betrayal and guilt.

Wolf by Gillian Cross (OUP, £5.99)

At night Cassie dreams of wolves. They are coming to get her. But how can she be kept safe? When Cassie is sent without warning from her nan's to live with her feckless, beautiful mother she becomes easy prey until she finds a way of protecting herself. A really haunting novel from Gillian Cross, whose books *The Demon Headmaster* (Puffin, £4.99) and *The Great Elephant Chase* (Puffin, £4.99) will give equal pleasure.

Two Weeks With the Queen by Morris Gleitzmann (Puffin, £3.99)

How many books for children deal with dying? How many deal with Aids? Morris Gleitzmann's does, and this hard-hitting Australian writer handles the subject with a surprising off-the-wall humour which ensures the book is moving and not at all mawkish. Colin refuses to believe that his younger brother is dying of cancer and decides to take things into his own hands. Then he meets a young man whose partner is dying of Aids, who helps him come to terms with living and losing.

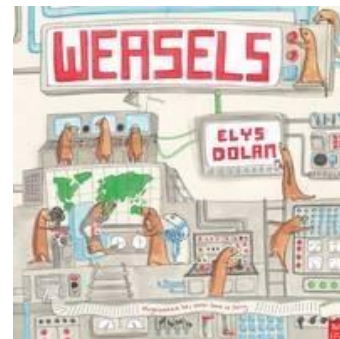
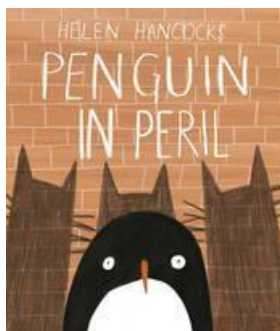
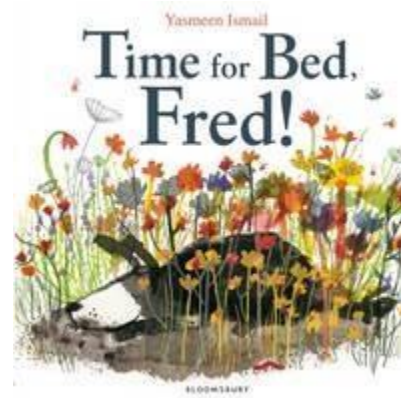
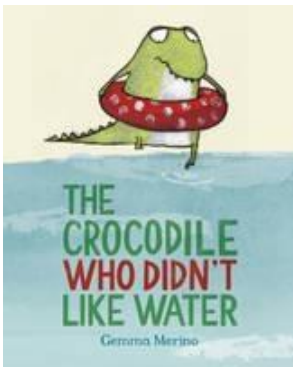
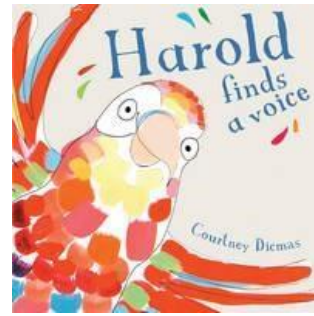
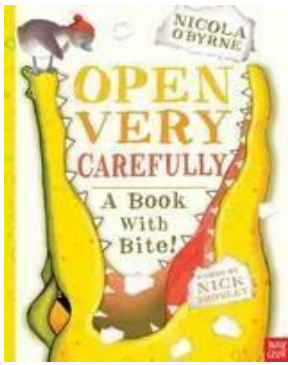
Goggle-Eyes by Anne Fine (Puffin, £4.99)

Kitty Killin is not only a good storyteller but also the World's Greatest Expert when it comes to mums having new and unwanted boyfriends, particularly when there is a danger they may turn into new and unwanted stepfathers. Oddly touching story about GoggleEyes, the most unwanted boyfriend of them all, written in a knock-kneed prose that is funny and affecting.

Smith by Leon Garfield (Puffin Modern Classics, £5.99)

Garfield's magnificent book was written in the 1960s, but has a Dickensian richness as it follows the adventures of Smith, a 12-year-old pickpocket living in the slums around St Paul's, who witnesses a murder and escapes with a document belonging to the victim. Hounded through London, befriended and betrayed, Smith eventually discovers that he has something of real value. Not an easy read if you are under eleven, but an enormously satisfying one. The vividness of Garfield's writing puts the blandness of many modern writers' prose in the shade.

Browse the Best Picture Book shortlist



Browse the Best Fiction for 5 - 12s shortlist

