

Reviews Picture Books for everyone

Can You See a Little Bear?

Written by James Mayhew
Illustrated by Jackie Morris
Frances Lincoln £10.99 ISBN: 1 84507 298 7



This inspired book more than deserves to become a prize-winner as well. Jackie Morris's luminous illustrations are simply breathtaking, mixing familiarity with mystery in just the right proportions. James

Mayhew's rhyming text has something of the same quality. Together they have created as fine a book as any infant, parent or teacher could possibly wish for. Buy it and see for yourself.

Nicholas Tucker

Chicken for Supper

Written by Carrie Weston
Illustrated by Sophie Fatus
Simon & Schuster £10.99
ISBN: 1 4169 0485 9



Mother Fox promises her five cubs that there will be chicken for supper if they behave themselves whilst she is away hunting. They disobey her and wander off into the night. When one is lost they land themselves in all sorts of trouble. Mother Hen comes to the rescue and they really do have chicken for supper, as a helpful friend. An easy-to-understand story, simply told in words and vividly interpreted in bold pictures.

Susan Poulson



Imagine

Written and illustrated by Ruth Brown
Andersen Press £10.99
ISBN: 1 84270 453 2

Ruth Brown brings her exquisite painterly touch to the world of opposites in this bedtime rhyming book. The opening spread shows a child looking out of the window at a cloud-filled twilight sky. The cat is on the windowsill and they are both staring at the clouds which are made to look like sheep. "Imagine, when you're half asleep, those big white clouds look just like sheep..." But instead of counting them, why not go on imagining.

Cue for the sequence of opposites - slow/fast, first/last, round/flat, hot/cold etc.

This book is infinitely more subtle than the host of board books that introduce opposites to young children in a crude, self-consciously educational manner, with flashcard-style illustrations. The spread illustrating dark versus light, for example,

has the same overall brightness level on both sides. On the left-hand side, a cat is on a wall at night with the light from a street lamp diffused through a heavily leafed tree. On the right-hand side (a continuation of the same street scene) some of the house windows are filled with a soft gold glow.

Michael Thorn

Zig Zag

Written by Robert D. San Souci
Illustrated by Stefan Czernecki
Tradewind Books £9.95 ISBN: 1 896580 43 2



Made from scraps of material Zig Zag is such a strange looking doll that the other toys in the doll-maker's shop squeeze him off the shelf and into the dustbin. He then has frightening encounters

with an owl, and an encouraging meeting with field mice, before finding a home with a little girl who loves him because he is different. This Canadian publication combines the talents of a prize-winning author, Robert D. San Souci with the skills of a real toy-maker and illustrator. Intended for three to six year olds this is a colourful, charming book which is sure to become a bedtime favourite.

Jack Ousbey

A Head Full of Stories



Written by Sue Swallow
Illustrated by Tim Archbold
Evans £7.99
ISBN: 0 237 53070 8

This bright little book can only be enjoyed if the reader knows and recognises the seven traditional tales referred to as young Jack tells story after story himself. Although Cinderella is actually named, others like *Jack and the Beanstalk* or *Little Red Riding Hood* can only be inferred by looking at Tim Archbold's excellent accompanying pictures. This early example of inter-textuality is great fun and particularly attractive to young children who already know plenty of the good old tales for themselves.

Nicholas Tucker

The Magic Bedtime Book

Written by Vivian French
Illustrated by Emily Bolam
Orion £10.99 ISBN: 1 84255 168 X

Spotty Frog loves to sing, and his voice resonates loudly in the magic forest. Spotty's mum warns

him to be quiet for his singing might attract the attention of humans whose presence would disturb the magical characters that live in the forest. It's at that moment that he meets Ruby, who looks like a dreaded human. She's overheard the warning from



Spotty's mum, and knows just how to manipulate Spotty into doing what she wants, which is to collect stories for her story bag from the forest inhabitants. They set out together and meet a variety of characters, each of whom tells a story. Soon the bag is overflowing. By the end of the book, there's still one story that needs to be resolved - who exactly is Ruby? The larger story of Ruby and Spotty threads its way through the stories told by the magical forest dwellers, so adding a further layer of interest along with eye-catching watercolour illustrations.

Anne Faundez

Meggie Moon

Written by Elizabeth Baguley
Illustrated by Gregoire Mabire
Little Tiger Press £5.99 ISBN: 1 845 06088 1



Digger and Tiger are two boys that go together like dustbin and lid. The scrapyard is their territory. One day a girl arrives with a real talent for transforming scrap materials into the most wonderful objects - like a

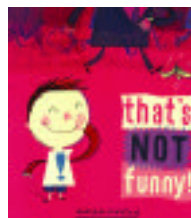
racing car or a pirate ship. The quiet stranger who walks into town and changes people's lives is not always male, but in this story I feel the transformation counts for more than gender. Boys will be boys and girls will be girls but a pile of rubbish that becomes a spaceship - now that's something else! Wonderful.

Mike Maran

That's Not Funny!

Written and illustrated by Adrian Johnson
Bloomsbury £10.99 ISBN: 0 7475 7431 6

This is a picture book about 'schadenfreude', a malicious delight in the bad luck of others. The final spread makes that explicit, with a definition, a guide to pronunciation, and an explanation that there is no single English word equivalent to the



German term. Johnson was the illustrator for Kate Lum's prize-winning *What!* a few years ago, and both the illustrations and the page design in *That's Not Funny* are of the highest quality. Alfie likes to laugh when things go wrong for other people, so when Grandpa suggests a trip to town, Alfie says yes because "there'd be a lot of things to laugh at in town." His pet mouse Mr Swiss goes along too, and manages to make a guard at the Palace trip over, which, of course, Alfie finds very funny. And, as he predicted, there are plenty more mishaps to make him chuckle. His grandpa

decides Alfie's sense of humour needs broadening, and proposes a trip to the circus, where Alfie remains defiantly unamused. Eventually, through another intervention from Mr Swiss, who mistakes an elephant for a giant cheese, Alfie is well and truly flattened and made the brunt of the circus audience's glee. Predictably, he is not amused.

Michael Thorn



Max

Written & illustrated by Bob Graham Walker £5.99

ISBN: 1 4063 0023 3

This is a slim, witty picture book that operates on two levels,

providing humour for the adult as well as an entertaining tale for the child. The pictures are bright and engaging, with some more detailed than others that make you look more closely. They also prompt the child listener to find things and talk about what's going on. Definitely a book to snuggle up with on the sofa.

Yvonne Coppard

Dinosaur Chase!

Written and illustrated by Benedict Blathwayt Hutchinson £10.99 ISBN: 0 0918 9293 7

Fin the dinosaur and his mates are happily playing a game of daredevil when a gang of bullies descends upon them, causing the friends to



scatter. Fin runs away as fast as his spindly legs allow him, the bullies in hot pursuit. Whatever he does to escape their clutches - sprint, jump, swim, hide - the bullies can do better until, at the very last minute, he discovers his strength. A lively text, good use of type size and luminous illustrations that vary from full-size to a sequence of four per page ensure that there is a surprise on every spread. This is a book with a wide appeal.

Anne Faundez

It's So Unfair!

Written by Pat Thomson
Illustrated by Jonathan Allen
Andersen Press £10.99 ISBN: 1 84270 479 6



A wonderful read aloud story which, when the listeners join in (as they surely will), becomes a comic production. Cat has been thrown out of the farmhouse in disgrace. All his friends in the farmyard are shocked into vociferous support for him. By using the

well-loved ploy of adding an additional confession each time the news passes on, the listeners' involvement builds into a great excitement when the farmer prepares to reinstate him, but ... Pat Thomson uses repetition and alliteration to great effect for capturing, and holding, the attention of her audience and the book is a visual explosion of fun and imagination. Changes of mood are humorously recorded through the facial

expressions and posture of both the human and animal characters - a great new collaboration between author and illustrator.

Jenny Blanch

The Adventures of the Dish and the Spoon

Written and illustrated by Mini Grey
Jonathan Cape £10.99 ISBN: 0224 07037 1



A Moony Tunes 78 rendition of 'Hey Diddle Diddle, The Cat and the Fiddle' prompts the dish and the spoon to run away together again. Out of the window they go,

through swirling net curtains, over the cliff top and down into the sea. They float all the way to New York, where they perform as a travelling act. But the Dish acquires a taste for the high life and the pair get into money trouble. Grey paints some hilarious scenes, with words and pictures, to show the dish and spoon down on their luck. Eventually, after a bank robbery, they appear on a WANTED poster, get caught and locked up for twenty-five years. At the end they meet again in a junk shop, where, by chance there is another copy of the Moony Tunes 78. Hearing it played again inspires them to go on the road with a comeback act. Delightfully inventive.

Michael Thorn

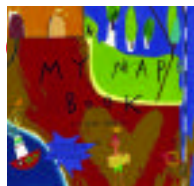
When a Zeeder Met a Xyder

Written by Malachy Doyle
Illustrated by Joel Stewart
Doubleday £10.99
ISBN: 0 385 60793 8



Text and illustration are perfectly matched in this hugely endearing humorous story about overcoming difference. Two lonely creatures, one a Xyder, the other a Zeeder, set out from different directions in search of someone just like them to be their friend and lifelong partner. They each confide in a slippery trout and a mountain goat, both of whom are confident that the creatures will find their perfect match. On their travels, the creatures cross paths but since Xyder is tall, green and hairy and Zeeder is small, bald and rather blue, it seems that they are not made for each other. Or are they? The simply conveyed - though profound - storyline, alliterative text and softly coloured illustrations will ensure a wide audience for this elegant book.

Anne Faundez



My Map Book

Written and illustrated by Sara Fanelli
Walker Books £10.99
ISBN: 1 84428 030 6

This book will encourage everyone of whatever age to start drawing maps of their house, room, family, foods and many other whacky and sensible ideas. Sara Fanelli's design is impeccable, her view

in this book childlike and her use of colour and text inspiring.

Enid Stephenson



Ask Me

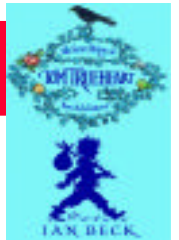
Written and illustrated by Antje Damm
Frances Lincoln £9.99
ISBN: 1 84507 386 X

I love this little book. Based on Donata Elschenbroich's ideas about children as 'natural scientists' and in particular her book *Weltwissen der Siebenjährigen* (*The World Knowledge of Seven-Year-Olds*), Antje Damm has produced a breathtakingly simple means of prompting from children a demonstration that they can indeed, as Elschenbroich argues, think about and respond to a range of practical and philosophical questions, and that it is only the mass of acquired knowledge that differentiates the child from the adult. Simple in concept - a direct question on the left-hand page, an illustration designed to help prompt a response on the right - and pleasingly designed (every question has a different background colour), the book cannot help but generate rich adult-child conversation. It could be used one-to-one, or with a small group.

Michael Thorn

The Secret History of Tom Trueheart

Written and illustrated by Ian Beck
Oxford University Press £6.99
ISBN: 0 19 279203 2



A novel departure for illustrator Ian Beck. The Trueheart boys are a family of Fairy Tale Adventurers. Professionals, you understand. Off they go to rescue all those traditional princesses. Alas, back at the Story Bureau, one of the sprite bureaucrats has gone to the bad and he makes sure all the brothers are destined to fail. Everything depends on the youngest brother, Tom, whose first official challenge will be to see if he can defeat the evil sprite and restore all the happy endings. This rolling adventure would make a great serial for families and classes. It has a sympathetic and engaging spirit and the illustrator is still there in the charming silhouettes which decorate the pages.

Pat Thomson

Sweets

Written and illustrated by Sylvia van Ommen
Winged Chariot Press £7.99 ISBN: 1 905341 02 4



The first book by a young Dutch writer and illustrator. This is a gentle, almost philosophical, discussion of life, the universe, and death by a rabbit and a cat. Its simple line drawings underline the thoughtful text.

Not a book for very young children but I could imagine it gaining cult status among students.

Enid Stephenson