

Reviews First Steps

At the End of the Garden

Written by Penny Dolan Illustrated by Martin Impey
Franklin Watts £8.99 ISBN: 978-0749671594



This is one of the hardback *Tadpole* series of which there are many more similarly structured stories to support newly independent readers. The text is rhyming and rhythmical and in large bold print – only two lines per

page, surrounded by helpful and beautiful colour illustrations. There's a gentle cumulative suspense, with plentiful detail yet simplicity, and a hint of magic. Just right to inspire youngsters to become more confident readers.

Gill Roberts

The Moon in Swampland

Written and illustrated by
M.P.Robertson
Frances Lincoln £6.99
ISBN: 978-1845073275



It is always exciting coming across a new

picture book from this wonderful artist, and sure enough this latest title lives up to his highest standards. Adapted from a creepy old folk tale set in the Lincolnshire marshlands, it tells how the moon – in the shape of a beautiful young girl – is captured and then imprisoned by some exceedingly ugly, green Bogles, all with scaly wings, long tongues and grasping hands. But when villagers discover the moon is no longer shining, they set out to rescue her despite their snarling opponents. There is so much to wonder at here, from the atmospheric swamp itself to all the other special effects this illustrator keeps up his sleeve. And at this price for a hardback picture book – what a bargain!

Nicholas Tucker

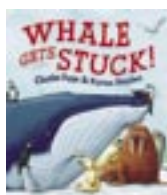


Listen, Listen

Written by Phyllis Gershator
Illustrated by Alison Jay
Barefoot Books £10.99
ISBN: 978-1846860843

Written on paper which is 'ancient-forest friendly' this book celebrates all the sights and sounds of the seasons. It is a delightful concoction, mixing a noisy rhythmic text with beautifully detailed illustrations. *Listen, Listen* demonstrates completely Barefoot's commitment to the environment, without losing for one second the sense of fun and enjoyment which a book can, and should, provide for young readers. This is a perfect antidote to the frantic frenzy surrounding synthetic phonics. Used wisely and frequently the text will be acquired by heart, and [surprise, surprise] reading will make sense to the keen code-crackers in our homes and classrooms.

Jack Ousbey



Whale Gets Stuck!

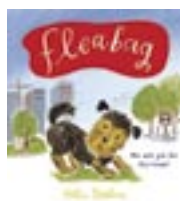
Written by Karen Hayles
Illustrated by Charles Fuge
Simon and Schuster £5.99
ISBN: 978-1847382115

The illustrations for this simple tale are superb – the sumptuous colours and accurate detail conjure up the cold land of the Arctic and the animals that live there. They are all here – the walrus, the dolphins, the puffins, the polar bears and seals, each portrayed true to life as they attempt to free their friend Whale. The simple text cleverly conveys the humour and suspense as the animals each try to solve Whale's predicament. Throughout, this perfect pairing of author and illustrator evokes a real feeling of icy grandeur with a most satisfying ending.

Louise Stothard

Fleabag

Written and illustrated by Helen Stephens
Alison Green Books £10.99
ISBN: 978-1407105635



Lively illustrations match the simple text superbly.

A delightful story about a small, appealing dog (though, alas, with copious fleas which don't endear it to adults) and a small, lonely boy who become good friends. But one day soon the boy's family plan to move away and what will happen to that all-important friendship? There is, I'm pleased to say, an extremely satisfactory ending to the story.

Enid Stephenson



The Ravenous Beast

Written and illustrated
by Niamh Sharkey
Walker Books £7.99
ISBN: 978-1406307450

Big, confident pictures complement a very simple tale of hungry animals. The Ravenous Beast's opening bid, 'I could eat the big yellow house on the hill' is dismissed by a succession of other animals. Each claims to be the hungriest and comes up with an ever-wilder list of the things they could eat. But who is, truly, the hungriest of all? The word-sounds are great to read and repeat with young children and the illustrations are refreshingly uncluttered. All this and actor Kevin Whately's gorgeous voice telling the story on the accompanying CD. What more could you ask?

Yvonne Coppard

A Dinosaur Called Tiny

Written by Alan Durant Illustrated by Jo Simpson
HarperCollins £5.99 ISBN: 978-0007233908

This delightful book contains a positive message by way of a fun and original story. When Tiny the

Dinosaur hatches out of a giant egg, everyone is surprised by how small he is. He grows only very slowly and is often teased by the other youngsters who leave him out of their games. As a result Tiny becomes independent and finds friends who like him for who he is. Naturally, the day comes when Tiny is able to demonstrate 'small is good' even for dinosaurs. Excellent for sharing and joining in with the loud words 'crash' and 'crack' which appear often. The bold and funny illustrations make young children laugh out loud – especially the picture of Tyro sticking out his tongue.

Jane Hall



Rumblewick's Diary: My Unwilling Witch Gets a Makeover



Written by Hiawyn Oram
Illustrated by Sarah Warburton
Orchard Books £4.99
ISBN: 978-1846160660

The creature whose diary we are privy to is actually Rumblewick Spellwacker Mortimer B, the familiar of Witch Haggy Aggy, the most unwilling witch in Witchdom. She spends most of her time trying to be something or someone else, and consequently Rumblewick spends much time keeping her out of trouble. In this book she decides to become a model and immerse herself in all things pink. The huge expenses come to the attention of the High Hags and Rumblewick is ordered to keep Haggy Aggy focused on the imminent Fright Night celebrations or else! Would-be-readers will be immediately engaged by the inviting and hilarious artwork and encouraged by the short chapters.

Jane Hall

The Princess and the White Bear King

Written by Tanya Robyn Batt
Illustrated by Nicoletta Ceccoli
Narrated by Miranda Richardson
Barefoot Books £6.99
ISBN: 978-1846860935



All the necessary ingredients of the traditional fairy story are here: the powerful king who favours the youngest of his daughters; a mysterious white bear who carries a golden crown; turreted castles with tapestries and treasures; a huge glass mountain, and; a set of almost impossible tasks before the 'happy ever after' ending. The author tells this compelling tale, based on three classic stories from different cultures, with the support of Nicoletta Ceccoli's wonderfully dreamlike, slightly off key illustrations. This sumptuous publication is accompanied by a CD narrated by Miranda Richardson, which, if all goes well, will be a superfluity.

Jack Ousbey