

booktrust

best book guide





The children's books in this guide have been selected from the many outstanding titles – from picture books to teenage fiction – that caught our eye during the first half of 2006.

All of these reviews, along with hundreds of other recommendations for all ages, can be found on our website www.booktrusted.com.

www.booktrusted.com

Our website contains features and interviews with many of the authors whose books are included in this guide, and we've highlighted these links in our reviews. You can also explore the work of contemporary children's book illustrators at www.booktrusted.com and, if you are a teacher, access free educational resources from lesson plans to subject book lists.

The reviews are grouped into four different age categories:

- > 5 years and under**
- > 5 to 8 years**
- > 9 to 12 years**
- > teenage**

Reading Age and Interest Level

For each book we have recommended a suitable reading age, which refers to the age the child would have to be to read the text themselves, and interest level, the age range that may enjoy the book, whether they read it themselves, or have it read aloud. You can also search for book recommendations at www.booktrusted.com by reading age and interest level.

www.booktrusted.com keywords

We have provided a list of keywords for each title, to help you identify the themes and issues dealt with in each book. You can also use these keywords when you visit our website www.booktrusted.com, where you can search our extensive on-line database of reviews for other titles containing the same or similar themes.

about booktrust

Booktrust is an independent national charity that encourages people of all ages and cultures to discover and enjoy reading. The reader is at the heart of everything we do.

Booktrust runs a variety of schemes, projects, prizes and websites, all of which aim to promote books and reading. Listed below are just some of the things we do relating to children's books.

> **Bookstart**

A national programme that works through locally-based organisations to give a free pack of books to babies with guidance materials for parents and carers.

It aims to promote a life-long love of books and is based on the principle that every child in the UK should enjoy and benefit from books from as early an age as possible.

www.bookstart.org.uk

> **National Children's Book Week**

Celebrating the wonderful world of children's books.

Each year schools, libraries and bookshops hold events and activities that focus on the enjoyment of reading and aim to encourage as many children as possible to enjoy books.

Booktrust provides colourful and useful resources to help run successful book weeks or events.

www.booktrusted.com

> **Writing Together**

Aims to ensure that during their time at school, every child has the opportunity to work with and be inspired by professional writers.

www.booktrust.org.uk

> **Bookmark: Books and Disability**

This website is for anyone looking for information and advice about reading difficulties, disability and children's books.

www.bookmark.org.uk

> **Children's Laureate**

The post of Children's Laureate is awarded once every two years to an eminent writer or illustrator of children's books to celebrate outstanding achievement in their field. It is currently held by Jacqueline Wilson.

www.childrenslaureate.org

> **Booktrust Early Years Awards**

This prize – the only one to focus on books for the under-5s – is divided into three categories: Baby Book Award, Pre-School Award and Best New Illustrator Award.

www.booktrust.org.uk

> **Nestlé Children's Book Prize**

Formerly the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize. Awarded to the nation's best children's books in three age categories, as voted for by children themselves.

www.booktrust.org.uk

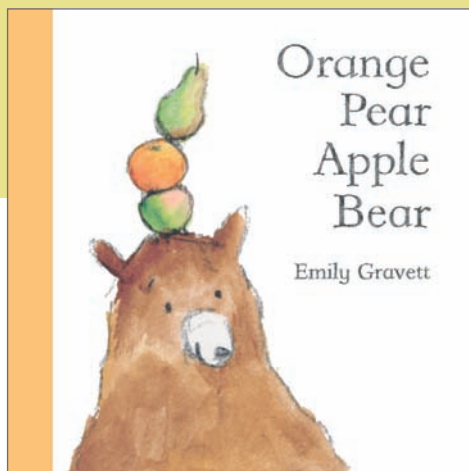
> **Booktrust Teenage Prize**

Recognises and celebrates the best contemporary teenage fiction.

www.bookheads.org.uk

**5 years
and under**





Reading Age: 4 +
Interest Level: 18 months +
Keywords: animals, bears, rhyme

Publisher: Macmillan Children's Books
Format: hardback
Price: £6.99
ISBN: 1 405 05080 2

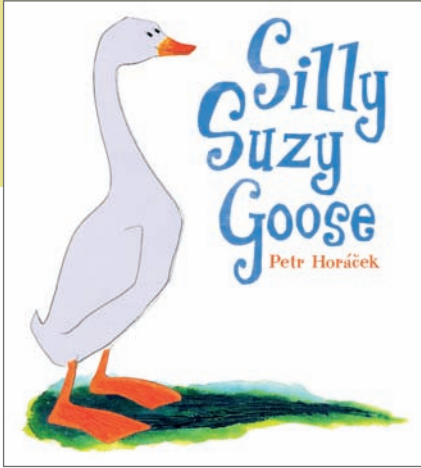
Orange Pear Apple Bear

**written and illustrated
by Emily Gravett**

Orange, Pear, Apple, Bear; these four simple words make up this delightful picture book (until the very last page) and provide ample inspiration for its charming illustrations.

Following her success with *Wolves*, Emily Gravett returns with this picture book for pre-school children. Her colourful, sparse illustrations cleverly depict a bumbling bear interacting in many different and imaginative ways with the fruit mentioned in the title.

The rhyming and repetition in the text make this a great book to read aloud; the gently humorous illustrations will provoke discussion and undoubtedly appeal to parents and children alike.



Reading Age: 5+
Interest Level: 0+
Keywords: animals, being different, humour, identity

Publisher: Walker Books
Format: hardback
Price: £9.99
ISBN: 1 84428 217 1

Silly Suzy Goose

**written and illustrated
by Petr Horáček**

Suzy wants to be different. She tries to copy other creatures to achieve this and squawks like a toucan, swims like a seal and jumps like a kangaroo. But when she tries to roar like a lion, her “rroarrhonk” annoys the lion and he chases her back to her flock, where she finds that anonymity is an asset!

A delightful collection of action-filled pages; the illustrations fit the text perfectly and will greatly entertain young readers, while introducing new vocabulary for actions and sounds.

Horáček's style is bold, funny and bright and the design uses fonts in a highly original and appropriate way. A splendid book for babies, and likely to prove useful as an Early Years Literacy tool.



Reading Age: 5+

Interest Level: 2+

Keywords: bedtime, familiar objects/environments, family

Publisher: Puffin

Format: paperback

Price: £5.99

ISBN: 0 141 50023 9

A Goodnight Kind of Feeling

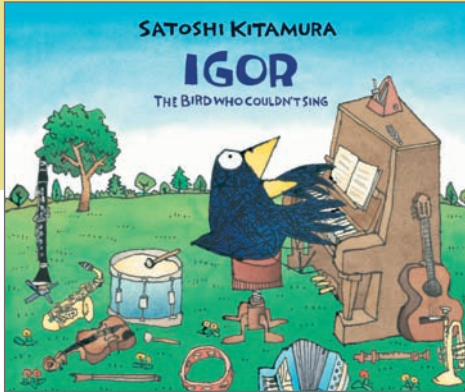
by Tony Bradman

illustrated by Georgie Birkett

Follow a father and son on this journey through their busy day. Families will identify with the pair as they visit the park, feed the ducks and then go on to the playground for that 'down the slide, can we go for a ride? Kind of feeling'.

Vivid, colourful illustrations beautifully convey the exhilaration felt by a small person with the whole world to explore, safe in the knowledge that at the end of the day he can return to his cosy house and experience the best feeling of all: 'that warm and snuggly, deep and duggly... goodnight kind of feeling'.

Touching domestic detail and a rhyming text filled with phrases that will no doubt be remembered and repeated for years to come make this an extremely satisfying read.



Igor: The Bird Who Couldn't Sing

written and illustrated
by Satoshi Kitamura

Reading Age: 5 +
Interest Level: 3 +
Keywords: animals, being different, birds, performing arts

Publisher: Andersen Press
Format: paperback
Price: £5.99
ISBN: 1 84270 522 9

> See our illustrators gallery at www.booktrusted.com for more information about Satoshi Kitamura.

Spring has arrived and Igor can't wait to express his joy by singing. But when he joins in the Dawn Chorus, the other birds fall about laughing.

Even Madam Goose, the music teacher, is defeated by Igor's individual style, so he decides, reluctantly, to renounce singing and flies off to a deserted plain where he sets about nest-building.

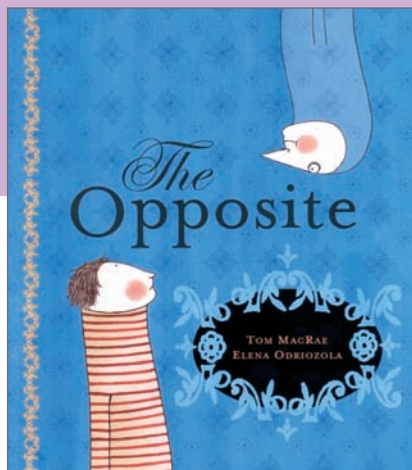
One evening, however, Igor is so struck by the beauty of the sunset that he breaks out in song once more, and this time his unique style has magical results...

This is a life-affirming and hugely enjoyable story about the joy of being different and self-expression.

Kitamura's colourful and expressive pen and watercolour illustrations, which are full of humorous, delightful details, such as a field full of orchestra-playing sheep, perfectly capture both Igor's joy and his individuality.



5 to 8 years



Reading Age: 6+
Interest Level: 4+
Keywords: familiar objects/
environments, humour, school

Publisher: Andersen Press
Format: hardback
Price: £10.99
ISBN: 1 84270 482 6

The Opposite

by **Tom MacRae**
illustrated by **Elena Odriozola**

When Nate wakes up one morning, he finds The Opposite standing on his ceiling staring down at him. From then on everything goes wrong for Nate, as he tries to carry on with his normal day.

The mischievous creature ensures that whatever the little boy says, the opposite will be true and of course Nate is soon in trouble both at home and school.

By some quick thinking, Nate figures out how to get the better of The Opposite and gets rid of it once and for all.

Children will enjoy the battle with the 'naughty' Opposite and the playful look at opposites in this humorous picture book, which is greatly enhanced by its delightfully quirky illustrations.



Reading Age: 5+

Interest Level: 5+

Keywords: adventure, humour, retelling

Publisher: Jonathan Cape

Format: hardback

Price: £10.99

ISBN: 0 224 07037 1

> Read how Nestlé Smarties Gold Medal winner Mini Grey got her distinctive name at www.booktrusted.com.

The Adventures of the Dish and the Spoon

written and illustrated by Mini Grey

We all know that the dish ran away with the spoon but Mini Grey's new book explores what happened to the nursery rhyme characters next.

The two are in love and sail off to 1920s New York, where they find fame and fortune as a vaudeville act. However, their lives take a downturn and the Spoon ends up in prison. Broken and despondent, the pair are finally reunited in a junk shop 25 years later and manage to find happiness together once more.

The text has a knowing humour that will be appreciated by adults, while Grey's distinctive artwork and attention to detail ensure that there is much for children to discover in her rich, humorous illustrations.



Reading Age: 6+
Interest Level: 5+
Keywords: boys, family, ghosts, pirates

Publisher: Puffin
Format: hardback
Price: £7.99
ISBN: 0141381302

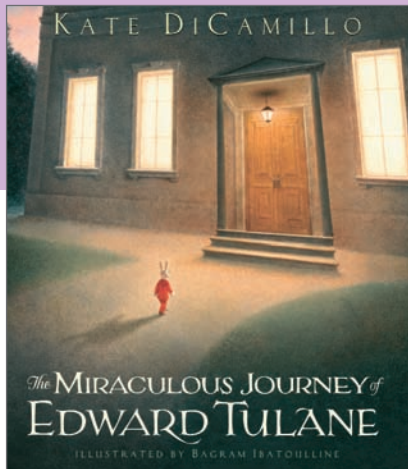
The Legend of Captain Crow's Teeth

by Eoin Colfer
illustrated by Tony Ross

Five brothers are spending the summer holidays in a cramped caravan in Ireland with their parents. They are mischievous little monkeys who are a trial to their parents.

Marty, the eldest, reads his brothers spooky stories, and his favourite is about Captain Crow, a cut-throat pirate who is out to get his revenge on any available nine-year-old boy. This summer, Will, who is nine years old, is to be the butt of Marty's most elaborate prank so far.

With characters last seen in *The Legend of Spud Murphy*, this is another light-hearted adventure for younger readers, in which the issue of sibling rivalry is deftly and humorously handled.



Reading Age: 8+
Interest Level: 7+
Keywords: adventure, America, death, friendship

Publisher: Walker Books
Format: hardback
Price: £12.99
ISBN: 0 7636 2589 2

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane

by **Kate DiCamillo**
illustrated by **Bagram Ibatoulline**

Edward Tulane is an impressive and immaculate china rabbit. Abigail, his owner, adores and cares for him completely, but Edward does not return her love. Edward is self-centred, proud and heartless; he cares nothing for love.

Then, through a series of accidents, Edward is separated from Abigail. His fine clothes, pride and his body are damaged as he passes through the hands of a fisherman, a hobo and a farmer's daughter. He learns about love and experiences the pain that comes with loss and death. He wonders if he can bear to risk loving again.

This is an unusual yet well-written and beautifully illustrated story. Edward's journey, both physical and emotional, is movingly told and full of vibrant characters.

9 to 12 years





Reading Age: 10+

Interest Level: 11+

Keywords: bereavement, family, fathers, friendship, new baby

Publisher: Puffin

Format: paperback

Price: £4.99

ISBN: 0 141 31883 X

Something Invisible

by Siobhán Parkinson

Jake likes encyclopaedias. He also likes thinking, talking, football and fish. So he's really not at all prepared for the changes in his world when a new baby sister arrives, making his step-dad a father. Neither is he prepared for meeting Stella, her eccentric and numerous family and their neighbour, old Mrs Kennedy.

Hanging out with Stella leads to unexpected, uncharacteristic things happening to Jake – like heroically saving a child from drowning. But then something truly dreadful happens, and Jake realises he doesn't really know anything at all.

Siobhán Parkinson's elegant, constantly surprising language perfectly captures Jake's personal interior life in this thoughtful, delicately devastating and beautifully paced novel. The book ultimately explores what it means to discover 'something invisible' that connects you to family or friends.



Reading Age: 9+

Interest Level: 9+

Keywords: bereavement, family, step-families, time-slip

Publisher: Bodley Head

Format: hardback

Price: £8.99

ISBN: 0 370 32891 4

> Read an interview with Susan Cooper at www.booktrusted.com.

Victory

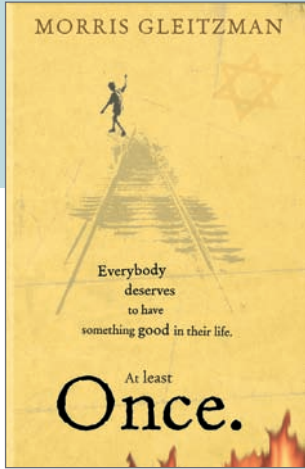
by Susan Cooper

Newbery Medal winner and Carnegie nominee Susan Cooper offers an outstanding contribution to the flood of novels inspired by the Trafalgar bicentenary.

Two children cross an ocean, two hundred years apart. Sam is a thirteen-year-old powder monkey aboard HMS *Victory*, while Molly is a present-day English girl transplanted from London to America and fighting a battle of her own against loss and loneliness. Like Sam, Molly has lost her childhood, but will find her future with help from 'the Nelson touch'.

For over thirty years Cooper has demonstrated her consummate skill in creating atmosphere, sympathetic characterisation and enthralling mystery. Sam's sea-borne hardships and Molly's psychological trauma interweave and coalesce in a meticulously researched text which may be read on several levels.

books for 9 to 12 years



Reading Age: 9+
Interest Level: 11+
Keywords: friendship, holocaust, orphans, World War II

Publisher Puffin
Format paperback
Price £5.99
ISBN 014132063x

> Listen to an interview with Morris Gleitzman at www.booktrusted.com and hear what inspired this book.

Once

by **Morris Gleitzman**

Felix has lived in a Catholic orphanage for over three years, but always expects his Jewish bookseller parents to come for him soon. Alarmed by the sight of what he assumes to be official 'librarians' burning Jewish books in the orphanage, he sets off in search of his parents to warn them of this danger.

On his travels Felix uses his natural optimism and storytelling gift to explain away the horrific events he witnesses in Nazi-occupied Poland. His stories bring hope to the children of a ghetto and ultimately comfort to them on their final train journey.

Gleitzman is gifted in bringing heart and humour to characters in difficult situations. His excellent depiction of the redemptive power of stories creates some uplifting moments of humanity and hope in this sad, deeply moving, portrayal of the Holocaust.



Reading Age: 9 +
Interest Level: 9 +
Keywords: adventure, fantasy, historical, magic

Publisher: Macmillan Children's Books
Format: hardback
Price: £8.99
ISBN: 0 330 44108 6

Dragon Keeper

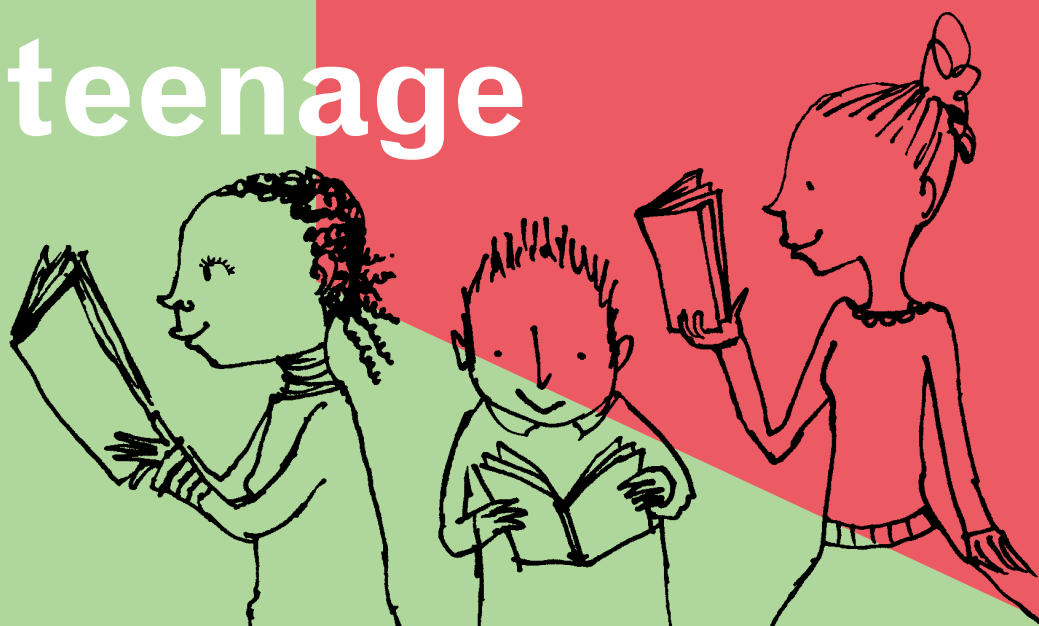
by **Carole Wilkinson**

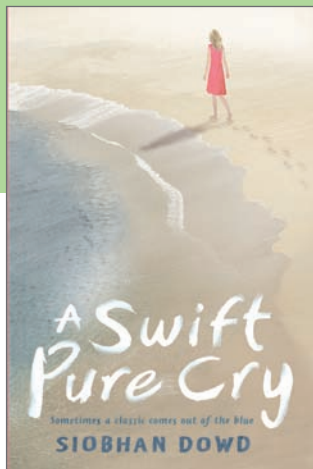
In ancient China, the Imperial dragons are slowly dying out. When only one dragon remains, it falls to Ping, a young slave-girl, to rescue him by escaping the greedy Emperor and undertaking the long and treacherous journey to Ocean.

Fighting enemies at every turn, Ping discovers she has hidden talents and powers which she must nurture and develop to protect the dragon and the beautiful and mysterious stone he carries.

This is a well-researched and fascinating story set during the long reign of Emperor Wudi in 141BC. Full of gruesome baddies and edge-of-seat tension and suffused with simple, honest Daoist philosophies, it is a rewarding and exciting read for both boys and girls.

teenage





Reading Age: 12+

Interest Level: 12+

Keywords: bereavement, growing up, Ireland, pregnancy, religion, sex, siblings

Publisher: David Fickling

Format: hardback

Price: £10.99

ISBN: 0 385 60969 8

> Siobhan Dowd tells us about the inspiration behind her novel at www.booktrusted.com.

A Swift Pure Cry

by Siobhan Dowd

This debut novel is set against a back-drop of 1980s Ireland and a community dominated by the Catholic Church. Shell's much-loved mother is dead and her father is a feckless alcoholic, which leaves her trying to care for her younger siblings virtually alone.

Shell, who is a naïve dreamer of a girl, catches the eye of local boy Declan Ronan but also feels a strong connection to the new young priest, Father Rose.

Soon Declan sets off for a new life in America, leaving the unworlly Shell pregnant and with no one to turn to in an unforgiving community. When Shell finds her mother's old pink dress in her father's wardrobe, she tries it on and a terrible sequence of events unfolds.

Loosely based on the real life case of the Kerry babies, powerful imagery and lyrical prose is woven throughout this unforgettable, outstanding and ultimately hopeful novel.



Reading Age: 10+

Interest Level: 12+

Keywords: historical, illness, love and romance, religion

Publisher: Walker Books

Format: paperback

Price: £6.99

ISBN: 1 84428 935 4

> Visit www.booktrusted.com and explore our teacher's resources on historical children's fiction and read an interview with Ann Turnbull.

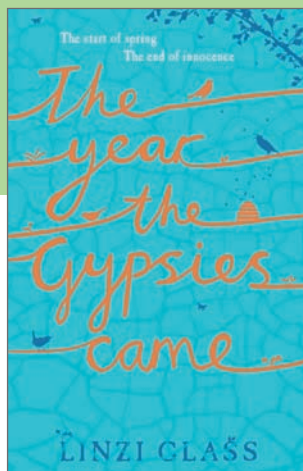
Forged in the Fire

by Ann Turnbull

It is the year 1665 and Will is working as a bookseller in London, hoping to earn enough money to marry his true love Susanna. In Shropshire, Susanna becomes increasingly worried as Will's letters grow fewer and news arrives of a terrible plague engulfing the city and killing thousands.

With a reckless disregard for her own safety, Susanna goes in search of her love, but although she eventually finds him safe and well, a new threat is in the wind, quite literally, as a great fire starts one night in Pudding Lane.

This is a fabulously atmospheric and beautifully written historical adventure and love story, set at a time of religious intolerance and uncertainty. Meticulous research makes this a fascinating read and although it is a sequel to the acclaimed *No Shame, No Fear*, it works perfectly as a stand-alone novel.



Reading Age: 12+
Interest Level: 12+
Keywords: Africa, death, family break-up, racism, rape

Publisher: Puffin
Format: hardback
Price: £10.99
ISBN: 0 141 38278 3

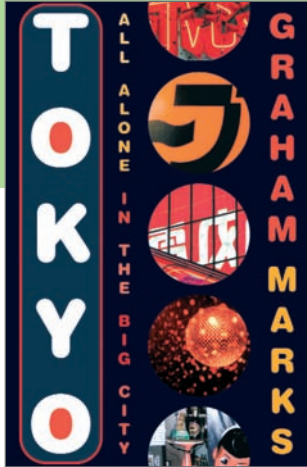
The Year the Gypsies Came

by Linzi Glass

From the outside, Emily's family lives the perfect, privileged white suburban life-style of late 1960s Johannesburg. They are guarded from the darkness of the woods and the apartheid-riven society beyond by Buza, their faithful Zulu night-watchman but inside the family is fragmenting.

Then one summer their very own gypsies come to stay – a family of rootless wanderers who camp in the garden. Soon dangerous undercurrents of adultery, racism and burgeoning sexuality inexorably surface. By the autumn, the family is changed forever.

Glass hauntingly captures the desperate intensity of Emily's loss of innocence, interweaving vividly realised strands of place, history and legend in this assured, beautifully constructed and moving debut novel. A book which will stay with you long after you have finished reading.



Reading Age: 11+

Interest Level: 13+

Keywords: family, growing up, thriller, Japan

Publisher: Bloomsbury Children's Books

Format: paperback

Price: £6.99

ISBN: 0 7475 8172 X

Tokyo: All Alone in the Big City

by **Graham Marks**

Charlie Grey has gone missing in Tokyo, but her parents and the police aren't doing anything. Her brother Adam decides there's only one option: to go there himself. He discovers that Charlie's travelling companions had an agenda of their own, and that what happened is quite different from what was reported.

Adam's investigations plunge him into the seamy side of Tokyo life, filled with call girls and drug dealers, but as a result he finds true friendship and a lasting relationship. Forced to live precariously, he gains self-confidence and discovers his own strengths, returning to London significantly more mature than when he left.

The book is revelatory not only about Tokyo, but also about a teenager's journey of self discovery – a twenty-first century Bildungsroman.

Here are some more of the books we have enjoyed reading over the last six months; visit www.booktrusted.com to see the full reviews.

> 5 years and under

Beep, Beep, Let's Go by Eleanor Taylor (Bloomsbury)

An assortment of animals enjoy a noisy day trip to the seaside.

Rabbit Pie by Penny Ives (Puffin)

It's bedtime for six young rabbits and their mother follows a loving recipe to get them all to sleep.

My Mum by Anthony Browne (Picture Corgi)

Small children love their mums and this colourful picture book explains why.

No Room for Napoleon by Adria Meserve (Bodley Head)

A dog takes over life on a paradise island in this book about society, sharing and bossy behaviour.

> 5 to 8 years

The Really Rude Rhino by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross (Andersen Press)

From the day he was born Rhino was rude, but one day he meets his match.

Burger Boy by Alan Durant and Mei Matsuoka (Andersen Press)

Benny eats nothing but burgers, until

one day his mother's warning comes true – he turns into one!

The Children Who Smelled a Rat by Allan Ahlberg and Katherine McEwen (Walker)

A fast, funny and improbable story about the Gaskett family – perfect for newly confident readers.

The Penderwicks by Jeanne Birdsall (David Fickling Books)

Four eccentric sisters spend an idyllic summer on a beautiful New England estate.

> 9 to 12 years

The Diamond of Drury Lane by Julia Golding (Egmont)

Cat Royal is a spirited, mystery-solving orphan living in the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

Candyfloss by Jacqueline Wilson (Doubleday)

Floss loves both her parents, but faces a dilemma when her Mum decides to move to Australia.

The Unluckiest Boy in the World by Andrew Norriss (Puffin)

Nicholas falls under an ancient curse and soon disaster dogs his every move, in this funny, well-written book.

**Blood Fever by Charlie Higson
(Puffin)**

The young James Bond is caught up in an exciting adventure in Sardinia.

> teenage

**The Book of Everything
by Guus Kuijer (Young Picador)**

Thomas uses the power of his imagination to protect himself from his violent father.

**Road of the Dead by Kevin Brooks
(Chicken House)**

Cole and Ruben travel to the wilds of Exmoor to investigate their sister's murder in this dark thriller.

**Just Like Tomorrow by Faïza Guene
(Chatto & Windus)**

Life in the Parisian suburbs is hard for Doria and her immigrant mother; however, they gradually learn to look to the future with hope.

**Set in Stone by Linda Newbery
(David Fickling Books)**

A young artist is appointed to teach two sisters at the beautiful Fourwinds house, but he soon discovers all is not what it seems.

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