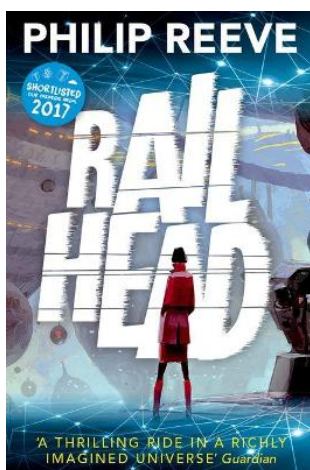


A selection of books especially selected for children in Year 9 (13 - 14 year olds) of average reading ability for the 2026/27 academic year.

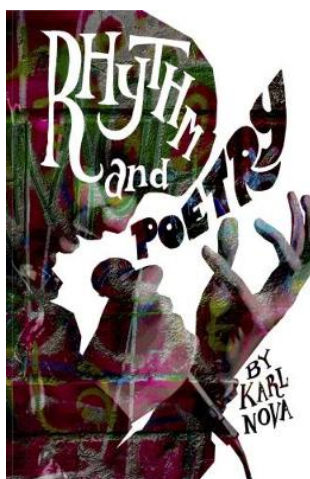
If your child is a competent reader or has read all these titles then try the books from the Year 10 list. Alternatively if these books are a little challenging try books from the Year 8 list. Our overall mission is to promote reading for pleasure with quality texts that are perfectly pitched for the age group and the curriculum. We have particularly avoided blockbusters, classic or set texts, known to everyone, so that we can include poetry, stunning information texts and inspirational books in which all children and young people can find themselves reflected.



Railhead

Author: Philip Reeve **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 04/08/2016

Set in a shining future world, where trains rumble not just through towns and countryside but across whole galaxies, Philip Reeve's new novel drenches its readers with extraordinary scenes, images and ideas. Zen Starling is a petty thief; offered the chance of a brand new life in return for carrying out one small job of course he accepts, and is immediately caught up in a war that could destroy his entire world. Beautifully written, brilliantly inventive, this gripping adventure, a combination of sci-fi utopia, conspiracy thriller and romance, will set hearts racing. Thoughtful readers prepared to take their time will find echoes of many other great works of fiction, all of which add to Railhead's richness. And who could resist the trains - 'the old, wise trains of the Network, barracuda-beautiful, dreaming their dreams of speed and distance as they raced from world to world'? It will turn us all into railheads.

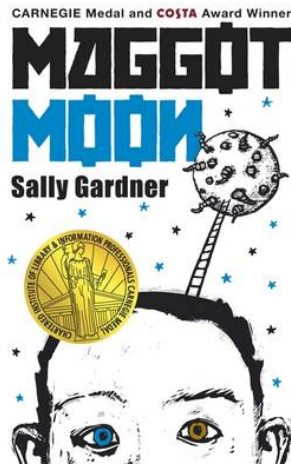


Rhythm and Poetry

Author: Karl Nova **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 27/07/2017

Winner of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award 2018

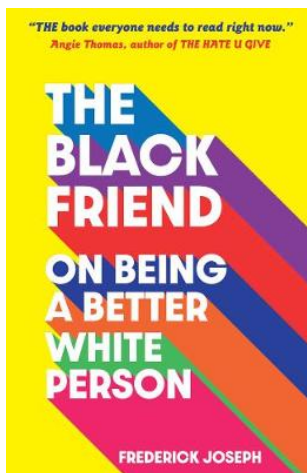
The first published collection from Hip Hop poet Karl Nova has a refreshing directness, honesty and authenticity. Many of the poems are drawn from the workshops he does with children and young people as well as from his performances. Notes accompanying the poems give insights into his process and encourage children to believe that they are poets too. The poems capture the rap beat and tone, demonstrating the currency and significance of rap as a form, especially for young people. A book that opens doors.



Maggot Moon

Author: Sally Gardner **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 03/01/2013

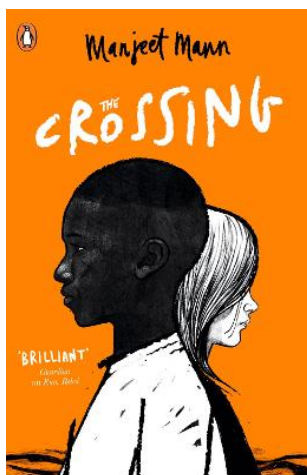
Winner of the two most prestigious children's book awards - the CILIP Carnegie Medal 2013 and the Children's Costa Award 2012. Sally Gardner tells a story that is rich in drama and ideas as Standish Treadwell, an unlikely hero, takes on the vicious forces of the repressive motherland in a novel set in a bleak world that is redeemed only by the very human qualities of some of the survivors. Standish and his remarkable grandfather keep going, eking out a living after the disappearance of Standish's parents. Standish struggles at school and is the victim of relentless bullying. But then he finds a friend in the newly arrived Hector. When Hector is taken, the only hope lies in Standish... Luckily, Standish has just the qualities that are needed. September 2012 Book of the Month.



The Black Friend: On Being a Better White Person

Author: Frederick Joseph **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 01/04/2021

Longlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2022 Information Books 3-14 Highly educative but engaging, personal and friendly and unpatronising tone makes this an essential read.

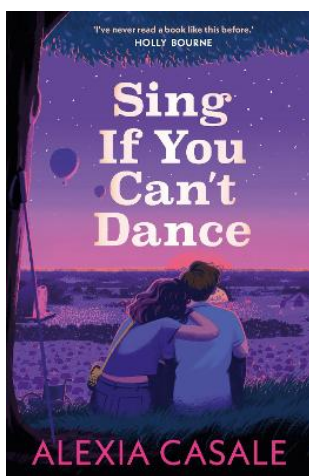


The Crossing

Author: Manjeet Mann **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 03/06/2021

Winner of the Costa Children's Book Award 2021 | Shortlisted for the Yoto Carnegie Medal 2022 | Shortlisted for the 2022 CLIPPA (CLPE Children's Poetry Award) | Winner of the UKLA Book Awards 2023: 11 - 14 The premise of this fascinating book is two teenagers from opposite sides of the world who form a connection through odd circumstances. Natalie has just lost her Mum to cancer and struggles to find a calm place in the world, whilst her brother reacts by rebelling and joining a hate filled far right anti-refugee protest and action group. Sammy has had to leave his home in Eritrea on the chance of a new life in Europe - running from conscription into the army - which is a form of slavery in his home country. Both characters have huge issues to face. Sammy's seem more obviously dangerous and overwhelming, though Natalie's are equally as difficult - without the

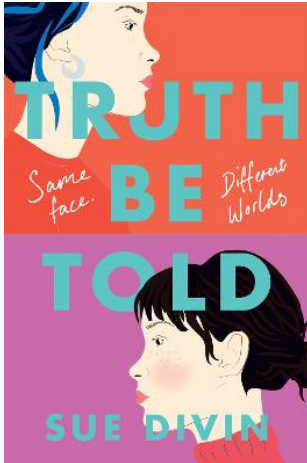
imminent danger. Told through a narrative poem using both voices to alternately express their fears, dilemmas and friendships this is a book you really can't put down. You have to know if Sammy and Natalie do get to meet. As the plot carries you along you also want to know more about the plight of refugees and the horrific characters that exploit them in many many ways. Natalie's decision to swim the channel to raise funds for the refugee charities creates a counterpoint in the narrative. The detail of her struggles and training plan seem an unlikely text for poetry - but it works! The author says "I wanted to make sense of what I was seeing, I wanted to do something that would help build empathy and understanding." She has most emphatically succeeded in this aim. This is such a profound story of hope, grief, and strength - I do recommend it to all. Be aware you will weep, too.



Sing If You Can't Dance

Author: Alexia Casale **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 06/07/2023

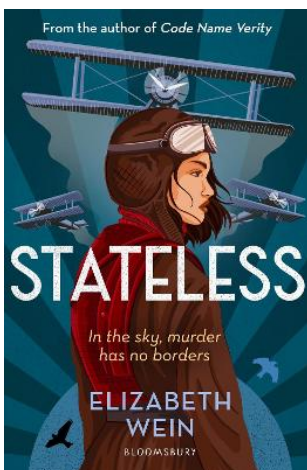
If ever a character had the right to be grumpy, sarcastic, and difficult it would be Ven. At 15 she was on the cusp of making the big time with her dance group when she collapsed on stage. Chronic pain and disability have taken that life away from her. But as she says, 'I am the life I make happen' and it is her choice that we never get to hear her diagnosis, because she will not be defined by that. She is still the endearing, loyal, funny, talented daughter, and friend and this is a thoroughly enjoyable teenage summer festival romance, with all the twists and turns, misunderstandings and revelations that readers will love. But what is so outstanding is the authenticity of the disability representation. While we can all feel her anger at things that should and could be better, Ven is no heroic victim wanting pity. Thrown together in a singing group with Ren, the boy who literally and painfully bumped into her life, Ven slowly realises that she still has options. This group, with all its bickering and individuals with their own problems, could be another chance for her dreams. None of this is mawkish or sentimental. These are all beautifully realised and authentic teenagers and even more refreshingly the adults are actually, with exceptions, supporting, loving and trying to help! Ven's unique and unforgettable voice tells a story with a message of resilience and determination to find a new path when life sets you back, that we all need to hear. A book which will allow young people living with disability to see themselves and that will give everyone greater empathy and understanding as well as being a truly enjoyable, entertaining read, is a book that all libraries must have.



Truth Be Told

Author: Sue Divin **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 14/04/2022

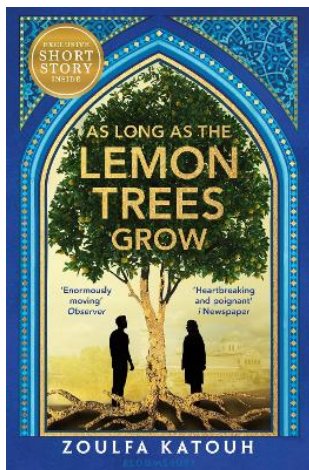
Shortlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2023: 11 - 14 Following her Carnegie shortlisted debut novel *Guard Your Heart*, this is another searing story set in Northern Ireland in 2019 but gradually revealing the lives of three generations of women affected by The Troubles. The author has a Masters in Peace and Conflict Studies and a career in community relations, which lends an unmistakable authenticity to the narrative. Narrated by two teens from very different backgrounds and dealing with very different issues with each voice unique and distinctive. Tara, the Catholic daughter of a two-generation single parent family from Derry, is angry and grieving after the suicide of her boyfriend Oran. Faith, the daughter of strict Evangelical Protestants from rural Armagh is hiding her true sexuality from her family for fear of being disowned. When they come face to face on an interfaith residential, they discover they look almost identical. When they unite to untangle the mystery, a DNA test reveals they are related and Faith's father is not who she thinks he is, while Tara has never known hers. This powerful and totally absorbing novel, with its unforgettable characters, is at its heart about truth and forgiveness, but inevitably also about social justice and how political decisions and the continuing legacy of violence and conflict continues to affect lives today. A reader cannot help but be moved and informed. A must-have as both a brilliant novel and for valuable insight on a historical period.



Stateless

Author: Elizabeth Wein **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 16/03/2023

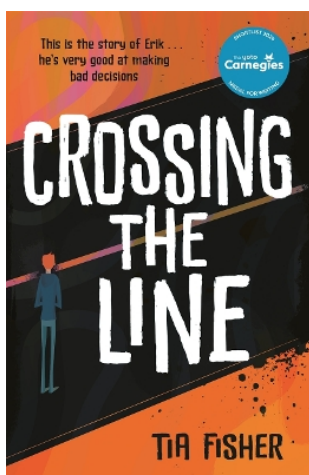
In a stunt to promote world peace just before the outbreak of World War Two, twelve young pilots take to the air. Taking off from Salisbury they loop round Europe travelling through Brussels, Geneva, Venice, Prague, Hamburg and Amsterdam before completion of the circuit in Paris. Stella North, aged just 17, who is representing Great Britain, is the only female competitor. She knows she is as skilful and as fearless as her male opponents. And she has a very special reason to be determined to win! Stella is as British as anyone but her passport defines her as stateless. The stakes and the tension are high. And that's before Stella is the only witness when another competitor dies. The organisers claim that it was an accident. Only Sheila knows the truth!



As Long As the Lemon Trees Grow

Author: Zoulfa Katouh **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 22/06/2023

October 2022 Debut of the Month Ferociously affecting and blazing with hope, Zoulfa Katouh's *As Long As the Lemon Trees Grow* tells an unforgettable story of a young woman whose heart is conflicted between love for her family and love for her Syrian homeland. It's a powerful debut that cuts to the core of what it means to feel loss, longing and love. A formidable story about "the ones who have no choice but to leave their home", as the author writes in her afterword. Until the fight for freedom erupted in Syria, 18-year-old Salama was a pharmacy student with a family and future. Now pretty much all she has is voluntary hospital work that sees her strive to save those who've been injured by military bombings and sniper attacks. While dealing with the ethical and emotional challenges of not being able to save all her patients, Salama is torn between needing to leave Syria to survive, and feeling she should stay to save her people and fight for her country. This devastating dilemma is heightened when she meets a young man, Kenan, who has links to her past. "This is my country. If I run away - if I don't defend it, then who will?", he tells her, and asserts he will never leave. As they form a beautiful bond, the young couple realise there's more than one way to rally for freedom, with Salama remarking that, "We are stripped from our choices, so we latch on to what will ensure our survival." Transcending age boundaries, and showing the very worst and best of humanity, this reveals truths about a tyrannical regime that's destroyed the lives of so many Syrians while telling a remarkable tale of love and hope. Read more about this breathtaking debut in a Q&A with the author Zoulfa Katouh.

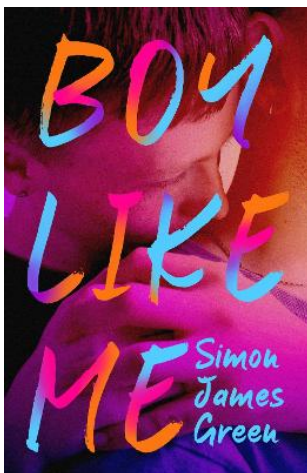


Crossing the Line

Author: Tia Fisher **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 30/03/2023

Yoto Carnegie Shadowers' Choice Medal for Writing 2024 | April 2023 Debut of the Month A stunning debut that makes full and highly skilled use of the narrative verse format, with imaginative use of font and layout, to tell an important story that the author acknowledges is based upon the real experiences of a friend's son. It highlights how easy it is for young people and children to be entrapped by ruthless drug gangs. But this portrayal of Erik goes far beyond a single issue, it is a thoroughly nuanced, credible portrait of a young man and the complexities of his life. It had been difficult due to bullying and rapidly worsens with the death of his father and then his mother's terrible choice of new partner, who abandons her and their new twin daughters, leaving Erik as her only support. Poverty and sleeplessness take their inevitable toll and behaviour and grades fall. Erik slowly finds himself abandoning his loyal friend Ravi and hanging out more and more with his former tormentors Travis and Ben and their dubious friends. Skipping school turns into shoplifting which turns into drug running. At first, it's easy money and almost a new kind of family. But the casual

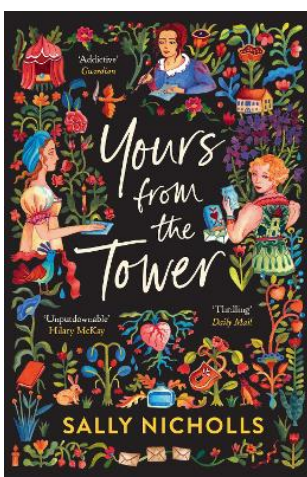
drop-offs soon escalate, as do the lies and deception. When Erik tries to escape the dark world he's fallen into, his baby sisters come under threat. But a powerfully realistic ending offers a credible way out of the dangerous situation Erik and his family are facing and directs readers to sources of help for those facing similar issues. Erik remains a likeable, self-aware, almost brutally honest protagonist throughout. He should not be defined by his bad choices but neither does he excuse his behaviour. In his portrayal the author shows that those involved in county lines activity should rightly be treated and perceived as victims rather than perpetrators - a stance campaigned for by the Children's Society (who checked the manuscript for authenticity) This is an outstanding and important novel that should be widely read by parents and teachers as well as by the young people who will find it gripping, relatable, authentic and unputdownable. Watch The LoveReading LitFest In Conversation With Tia Fisher, Author of Crossing The Line



Boy Like Me

Author: Simon James Green **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 02/03/2023

A loud and proud novel about censorship and growing up gay in a hostile world. With endearing characters and masses of optimism, this is a book that will break and the rebuild your heart.



Yours From the Tower

Author: Sally Nicholls **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 04/07/2024

September 2023 Book of the Month Set in 1896, *Yours From the Tower* is a clever, compelling epistolary novel that dances with the magic of female friendship, romance, and thought-provoking presentations of its historic context. Told, in the main, through letters between three young women, this splendid story invites “then and now” comparisons as it reveals how restrictive life was for women in the late nineteenth-century, along with the era’s huge social divides. After leaving boarding school, best friends Tirzah, Sophia and Polly are on the brink of leading disparate adult lives. This comes as a result of their very different backgrounds, and from them having very different personalities and dreams. Sophia, whose ambitions of being a journalist have been quashed by dint of her being female, has been ushered into the London Season to find a rich husband — preferably a titled gentleman. Meanwhile, Polly is loving life teaching in an orphanage, finding fulfilment in making a difference to poor children who’ve been

dealt terribly difficult starts in life. Then there's flighty Tirzah. Tortuously frustrated by being forced to act as her strict grandmother's unpaid companion, she makes a succession of rash decisions and harbours family secrets. With Sophia, in particular, voicing thought-provoking statements on injustices of the age ("It is unfair, isn't it? If we were men, there wouldn't be any of this bother about marrying well. We could go off to university and become lawyers or clergymen or go into business... But what are my options if I do not find a husband?"), Yours From the Tower also tingles with romance while being underpinned by the nourishing power of female friendship. It's also peppered with wit, such as this whip-smart quip from Sophia when addressing one of her suitors, bohemian aristocrat Sebastian: "I think you and Helena are absurd to call a policemen capitalist scum, when he earns an honest living and you and she are the grandchildren of an earl."



The Big Ask

Author: Simon James Green **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 06/06/2024

One of the notable features of YA novellas published by Barrington Stoke is that they're pithy page-turners — perfectly-paced, authentically-voiced works of short fiction across all genres that'll keep even the most reluctant readers keen right to the end. In the case of *The Big Ask*, it's all those things, along with being gorgeously romantic in a way that leaves you longing for more. Super-cute, unexpected, authentically funny and heart-flutteringly dreamy, there are so many reasons fans of YA romance should hope Simon James Green's Barrington Stoke debut is just the first of many novellas for the publishing house. The story is centred on an unlikely prom date between two ostensibly chalk-and-cheese teenage boys — geeky gay Alfie and super-popular, super-cool Harvey who's been in a relationship with his female equivalent since forever. Right before prom, Harvey finds himself single, which prompts Alfie to invite him to the prom, partly thanks to some serious encouragement from his bestie Jas. While the path to prom is strewn with obstacles — including a jealous ex and homophobic meddling — *The Big Ask* shows how magic can happen when you take a chance, follow your heart, and follow your true self.



Where Sleeping Girls Lie

Author: Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 14/03/2024

March 2024 Book of the Month Bravo to Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé for creating such a compelling dark academia mystery that's also layered with such potent depth. Though just shy of a whopping 600 pages, the pace and plotting of *Where Sleeping Girls Lie* is chef's-kiss superb, with tremendous page-turning power propelling a tale of surviving loss, trauma and abuses of power amidst the dark halls of an elite boarding school. Shot-through with suspense and escalating menace, the story begins when new girl Sade encounters trouble as soon as she sets foot in Alfred Nobel Academy, and her roommate Elizabeth goes missing. As suspicious eyes fall on Sade, she forms a bond with Elizabeth's best friend Baz (real name Basil), and they set about finding out what really happened to Elizabeth. As the duo make dark discoveries, aided by revelations from the "Unholy Trinity (as Baz has dubbed the school's "It girls"), a super-rich male student is murdered, which leads to the unravelling of a web of despicable secrets, lies, cover-ups and toxicity, and the unleashing of revenge.



Beastly Beauty

Author: Jennifer Donnelly **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 09/05/2024

May 2024 Book of the Month Another powerful and hugely enjoyable feminist retelling of a traditional fairytale, following on the success of *Poisoned* and *Stepsister* which reworked *Snow White* and *Cinderella* respectively. Here Jennifer Donnelly turns her modern gaze upon *Beauty and The Beast* and encompasses a gender swap in the process, which enables her to explore themes like societal expectations, stereotypical gender roles and self-acceptance. The original tale is thought by some scholars to have originated in 18th Century France as a cautionary tale to prepare young women for marriage to 'beastly' older men, as was so often the case. Set in the same period, Arabella was a rebellious and headstrong young woman who is cursed to be a beast because she dared to wish for more than just marriage and to let her anger get the better of her. After being cursed for so many years, she loses hope that the curse will ever be broken. Enter Beau, a handsome thief who breaks into her castle with his gang, but then is abandoned and trapped. At first, we have no more idea than Beau about who or what the Beast is, but he is as determined to solve the mystery as he is to escape. As each of their back stories is revealed we see that Beau and Arabella actually share a common struggle with their self-perception and self-image and neither think they are worthy of love, so how is the curse to be broken? This is absolutely enthralling storytelling, full of rich symbolism, psychological depth and a touch of magical realism, as well as an occasional thoughtful commentary on fairy tales. The romantic chemistry and witty banter of the lead characters is most enjoyable, but

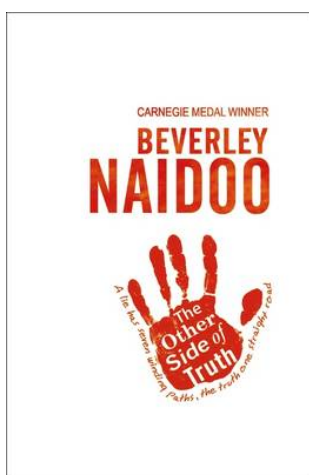
the well-drawn minor characters have their moments too. The reader is thoroughly invested in everyone's survival in the dramatic race against time as the curse counts down. Another winner!



Solo

Author: Gráinne O'Brien **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 03/04/2025

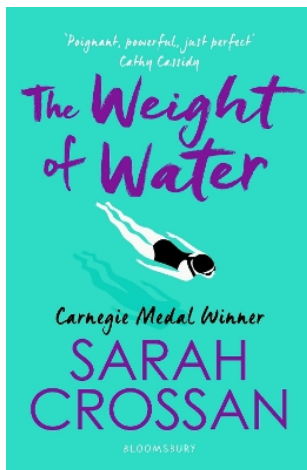
Daisy has just turned eighteen, but is in no mood to celebrate. Her recent breakup with David has destroyed her first passion, the recorder. She is lost in a blur of low self esteem and depression. When the summer ends and school starts, Daisy meets Flora, who has a unique energy and a love of music, specifically being an alto in the choir. Despite the idea of David still lingering on the periphery of her mind, Daisy finds through Flora a path back to the recorder and her love of music. When a family scare deepens Daisy's anxiety and guilt, her relationship with Flora and music in general becomes much more complex. This is a beautiful YA verse novel. Daisy is an extremely well-developed, complex and believable character that exudes all the frustration, rage and joy that an older teen can experience. She thinks of herself as an adult but also possesses the immaturity that is hard to shed as an eighteen year old. The novel is brimming with musicality, with each chapter being given a title that pairs with Daisy's love of music and her emotional state. As a verse novel, Solo strips away everything but the absolute essential to the story, there is a simmering energy to it that gives it an extra punch to the guts. O'Brien clearly is a master at developing inner agonies that crawl out from the page to wrap their tendrils around your heart. Solo is a deeply affecting novel that will leave you rooted to the floor, I loved it.



The Other Side of Truth

Author: Beverley Naidoo **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 27/04/2000

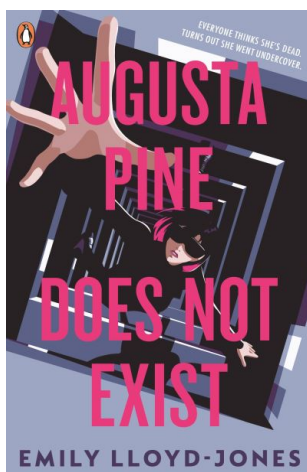
This is the story of 12 year-old Sade and her brother Femi who flee to Britain from Nigeria. Their father is a political journalist who refuses to stop criticising the military rulers in Nigeria. Their mother is killed and they are sent to London, with their father promising to follow. Abandoned at Victoria Station by the woman paid to bring them to England as her children, Sade and Femi find themselves alone in a new, often hostile, environment. Seen through the eyes of Sade, the novel explores what it means to be classified as 'illegal' and the difficulties which come with being a refugee.



The Weight of Water

Author: Sarah Crossan **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 02/05/2019

The Weight of Water is a startlingly original piece of fiction written in verse; most simply a brilliant coming of age story. First love, friendship and quiet courage combine in this spare and beautiful story that will leave you sad, happy and wanting more from this fantastic new voice in children's fiction. It tackles the alienation experienced by many young immigrants. Moving, unsentimental and utterly page-turning, we meet and share the experiences of a remarkable 12 year old girl who shows us how quiet courage prevails. A truly special and remarkable read that should not be missed and, Bloomsbury the publisher has done a wonderful job on the book itself - the best things come in small packages - and this is absolutely no exception, so buy the physical book and not the ebook.



Augusta Pine Does Not Exist

Author: Emily Lloyd-Jones **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 09/07/2026

August 2026 Book of the Month Perfect for tweens and young teens looking for exciting female-lead action stories, Augusta Pine Does Not Exist has plenty of twists that will have readers racing to the end. Main character Augusta is a complex character, officially dead, she has been recruited to work undercover for a secret, ethically-dubious government department. Flashbacks of her past deeds and missions are skilfully woven into the narrative, providing both context and further potential for action-filled thrills. Readers might not always agree with Augusta's actions, but they'll enjoy getting to know her and sympathising with her current situation. In comparison, they will undoubtedly fall slightly in love with her sidekick, Edgar, a sentient AI in the form of a very cute bumblebee. However, though he might initially seem cute, Edgar's lack of a moral compass and willingness to complete tasks by any means necessary, will surely send a shiver of fear through any reader considering the possibility of a future robot uprising. A well-balanced hint of romance slowly builds, which will be enough to satisfy those of a romantic leaning, without alienating readers who prefer their books to be hearts and flowers free zones. Perfect for readers who are excited by advances in technologies, Augusta Pine Does Not Exist depicts a steady stream of fresh new inventions that may be futuristic now, but feel like they will be utterly possible in the near future. I particularly enjoyed ruminating on the pros and cons of identity tattoos as a means of combatting identity fraud. Young readers who don't instantly trust authorities and/or those who enjoy reading about the grey areas between moral binaries, will love this book. Rather than clear cut villains and heroes, each character has a degree of ambiguity that keeps the reader guessing to the very end. And whilst that ending is entirely satisfying, there remains the potential for further books in what could be

bestselling series. I'm sure other readers will join me in eagerly awaiting August Pine's next mission.



Songs for Ghosts

Author: Clara Kumagai **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 12/03/2026

March 2025 Book of the Month Traversing modern America and Japanese folklore, music, myth and history, Clara Kumagai's *Songs for Ghosts* weaves a wondrous story of love, loss and longing. Told through the intertwined narratives of a contemporary Japanese-American teenager and a young Japanese woman's diary written a century ago, it explores universal themes of heartbreak, identity and displacement with subtle power. The story begins when Adam finds the diary in the attic of the house he shares with his dad, step-mom and little brother Benny. Sore from being dumped by his boyfriend, Adam can't draw himself away from the diary, not least as its author speaks of loss, the Japanese biwa lute that misses its owner, and being haunted. And then Adam himself feels and sees the presence of ghosts and is compelled to embark on a transformative journey to Nagasaki to discover more about the diary, and himself. Inspired by *Madame Butterfly*, *Songs for Ghosts* sings with potent cultural and historical detail as it tells a story that strikes relatable emotional chords, and lays bare the vital power of retelling tales and remembering real events that echo through time.

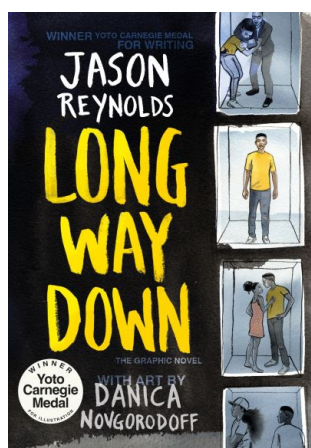


This Boy I Hardly Know

Author: Lisa Heathfield **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 07/05/2026

May 2026 Book of the Month Centred on unforgettable characters who were "inspired by the many brilliant children in care I've had the privilege of working with", as author Lisa Heathfield explains in the Afterword to her remarkable novel, *This Boy I Hardly Know* is an emotionally impactful story that shares brutal truths of the care system, including the widespread separation of siblings and the widespread use of restraint in run-for-profit care homes, through the story of two sisters, and the boy who changes everything for one of them. 16-year-old Dusty, a talented artist, loves her younger sister like nothing else, and will do anything to protect her. We first meet the siblings in the fractious context of yet another care placement: "Poppy and I have been shifted from place to place so often that I don't bother trying to make friends any more". Their current carers aren't "nice to us", Dusty makes clear to Poppy. All their "little cruelties" add up. And then the worst happens when Dusty is sent to a residential care home, while Poppy is placed with a new carer, hundreds of miles away. Set on being reunited with Poppy, Dusty finds a friend and soulmate in poetry-loving musician Cooper, who also knows how it feels to be separated from a sibling. When they go on the run together to find Poppy, a beautiful love story

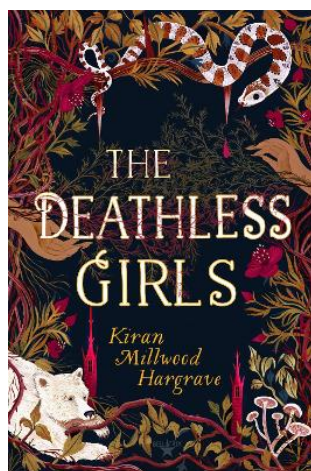
unfolds against a tense backdrop of being searched for by the police. "I swear his star has been hurtling towards mine since the day we were born", Dusty remarks, ahead of an edge-of-your-seat climax fuelled by desperation, deep love, and a stirring sense of light through darkness. Honest and empathetic, *This Boy I Hardly Know* is a richly-rewarding read for teenagers who respond to stories rooted in reality, and tales that glow with love and believable hope.



Long Way Down - The Graphic Novel

Author: Jason Reynolds **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 23/04/2026

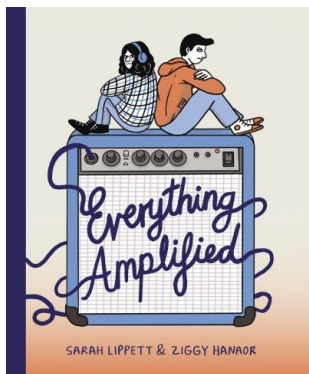
AND THEN THERE WERE SHOTS Everybody ran, ducked, hid, tucked themselves tight. Pressed our lips to the pavement and prayed the boom, followed by the buzz of a bullet, didn't meet us. After Will's brother is shot in a gang crime, he knows the next steps. Don't cry. Don't snitch. Get revenge. So he gets in the lift with Shawn's gun, determined to follow The Rules. Only when the lift door opens, Buck walks in, Will's friend who died years ago. And Dani, who was shot years before that. As more people from his past arrive, Will has to ask himself if he really knows what he's doing. This haunting, lyrical, powerful verse novel will blow you away.



The Deathless Girls

Author: Kiran Millwood Hargrave **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 02/04/2020

Born under a blood moon, twin sister travellers, Kizzy - a brave, voluptuous bear dancer - and Lil - slight in frame and blessed with a beautiful voice - are captured after their camp is ransacked on the eve of their divining, the coming-of-age rite that would have seen them learn their fates. With many kinsfolk slain, the twins are enslaved by Boyar Valcar and set to work in the castle kitchens, where rumours about the notorious Dragon loom large over all the female slaves. Separated when Kizzy is snatched away, Lil escapes to search for her sister with Mira, a fellow slave. As they race against time to save Kizzy, encountering the terrifying strigoi (undead) along the way, powerful desires are awakened, which adds extra conflict as the story winds to its transfixing climax. Driven by the sisters' passion and revenge, loyalty and love, and powerful on the persecution of travellers, this is a dazzling female-focused reimagining of vampire legends, with the writing infused with a lyrical earthiness throughout.



Everything Amplified

Author: Sarah Lippett, Ziggy Hanaor **Format:** Hardback **Release Date:** 18/09/2025

September 2025 Book of the Month This is a beautiful YA graphic novel that hits hard, it's one that will stay in your brain long after you've put it down. Nel, immersed in music, is trying to focus on GCSE's but is preoccupied with her twin brother Ludo. He's aggressive, a bully and clearly her mother's favourite, at least in Nel's eyes. She feels like she's watching her life unfold without her. Nel, in short, feels like she's spinning her wheels whereas Ludo appears to coast through everything without a care. The only that seems to be reliable in Nel's life is her music and her best friend, Kit. Then Ludo joins a band, and Kit starts to date the guitarist, Nel feels her friendships shifting from beneath her. But when Ludo drops out and Nel takes up his spot, she starts to realise her place in the world. I love how this graphic novel is structured, it's a very genuine teenage experience. We have deep moments of focus that are shattered by social media, mental pressures and thoughts that come and go like leaves in the wind. Nel's narrative reflects perfectly the uneven rhythm of figuring out who you are. It's an essential graphic novel to have in schools in my opinion. It tackles identity, friendships and independence. It's fast-paced, packed full of teen frustration, you can feel it dripping off of each page. The artwork is superb, and genuinely makes you feel you are inside a teenage brain. Little biographies of Nel's favourite artists and different online material "pops" up on the page, these are not distracting and in fact make the story more engaging. Whether teens are into music or not, they will absolutely love this gripping YA graphic novel. I cannot recommend it enough, it's brilliant.

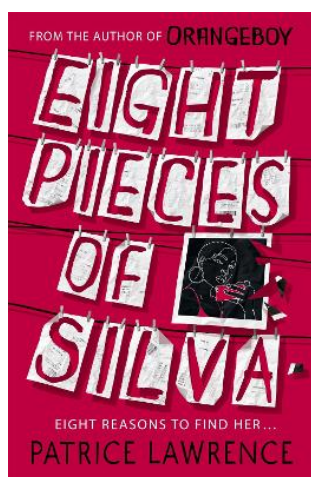


And the Stars Were Burning Brightly

Author: Danielle Jawando **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 05/03/2020

Shortlisted for the YA Book Prize 2021 | Longlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2021 | March 2020 Debut of the Month The author has revealed just how much of this searing novel is based upon her own experiences at school which lends credibility and authenticity to the situations described, but she has also created utterly believable and relatable characters with truly authentic teen voices and dialogue. Within a few pages we are thrust into the raw pain of grief and utter disbelief in the aftermath of a teen suicide. The narration alternates between 15-year-old Nathan, the younger brother who discovered Al's body and Megan the school friend who shared Al's passion for art, but each chapter is cleverly introduced by the voice of Al himself. Both Nathan and Megan are wracked with guilt, blaming themselves for letting Al down. Nathan, by not picking up the call from Al on that fateful afternoon and Megan by sticking with the 'cool' kids and not acknowledging Al as a friend. Nathan wants to understand why Al was

driven to suicide and Megan wants to prove to the world how special he was. Gradually we develop a deep and nuanced understanding of their growing relationship and of all the characters involved: be they friends, family or even 'villains'. There are no cardboard cyphers here. The thought provoking, intelligent writing also reveals the overwhelming influence of social media on the lives of young people. Megan can use Instagram and Facebook to positively celebrate Al's artwork, but together they discover the extremes of cyberbullying he had been exposed to and which ultimately pushed Al over the edge, helped by the casual spite which colours so much daily interaction on social media. This devastating, truthful and important novel is an essential school purchase, and will no doubt provoke valuable discussion both in classrooms and between peers. Find out more about the YA Book Prize including all the shortlisted titles.



Eight Pieces of Silva

Author: Patrice Lawrence **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 06/08/2020

Shortlisted for the YA Book Prize 2021 From the multi-award-winning author of Orangeboy, an addictive mystery that refuses to let you go long after you turn the final page. Can Becks piece the jigsaw together and find her sister before Silva loses herself? Find out more about the YA Book Prize including all the shortlisted titles.

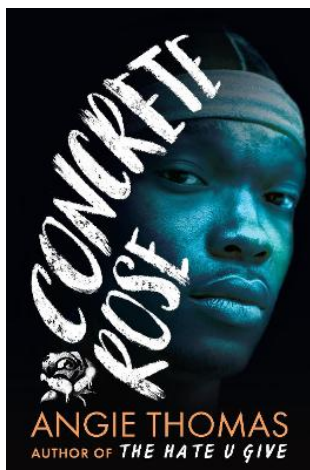


First Day of My Life

Author: Lisa Williamson **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 01/07/2021

Voiced by three unforgettable characters - Frankie, Jojo, and Ram, Frankie's ex boyfriend - whose lives are inextricably bound by unexpected, life-changing circumstances, this impactful novel sparkles with heart, hope and a riveting storyline. Jojo and Frankie have been best friends since forever. Both promising actresses, their lives are on the brink of new horizons, so when Jojo doesn't turn up to collect her GCSE results, Frankie is frantic with worry. Then, when she eventually hears from Jojo, and also hears a baby crying in the background, Frankie puts two and two together to get six. Could Jojo be responsible for the stolen baby that's being reported on the local news? Fearing the worst, Frankie does what she must for her dear friend. She tracks her down and discovers an unimaginable truth that truly tests their relationship. Radiant with uplifting portrayals of friendship, and demonstrating that it's possible to find a way through even the most seemingly impossible situations, this poignant page-turner packs a whole lot of punch in the

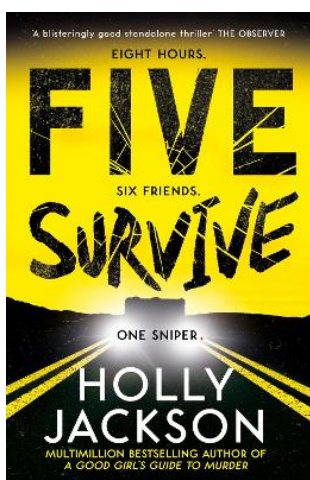
author's inimitably empathetic style. Of particular note is the way the novel shows that adults don't always have the right answer, that life can be confusing no matter what your age, which demonstrates Williamson's singular respect for her YA readers - she never talks down, and always writes in a spirit of openness.



Concrete Rose

Author: Angie Thomas **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 12/01/2021

This book is set 17 years before the action in Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* - showing how Star's father in THUG became the man he is. Maverick is an average teenage boy in the Garden Heights area - selling drugs to help the budget at home as his father is in prison. His Mum works two and sometimes three jobs to try to make ends meet - and Maverick knows he needs to graduate High School to stand any chance of becoming the man he wants to be. That is, until he discovers he is a father, and the baby's mother can't cope and hands baby Seven (named after Maverick's lucky number) to Maverick to care for. The difficulties of being a single parent, and the strong community who try to rally to Maverick's aid are wonderfully depicted in this powerful exploration of what it is to be a teen parent. But, it is never so simple as the community pulling together, Maverick also has to turn away from his gang life, standalone - but then his cousin Dre, who was more like a brother, is killed in a gangland shooting and dies in Maverick's arms. This is such a powerful book - totally honest in its appreciation of the difficulties of life, but so filled with humanity you cannot help but root for Maverick, even when you are scared what he might choose to do. This is one of those books that stay with you - that will change people's thinking, highlighting as it does some of the social injustices of growing up young and black in today's world. Read it, then read *The Hate u Give* - if you haven't already read it!



Five Survive

Author: Holly Jackson **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 20/07/2023

Shortlisted for the YA Book Prize 2023 An unmissable and suspense-filled thriller from the queen of UKYA crime novels.



Read Between the Lies

Author: Malcolm Duffy **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 02/02/2023

Alternating between the engaging narratives of two teenage boys, Malcolm Duffy's *Read Between the Lies* is a riveting, read-in-one-sitting page-turner, sharing insights into dyslexia as it also explores family frictions and how to support the people around you. Soon-to-be-stepbrothers Ryan and Tommy are as different as ice-cream and cabbage. Tommy has recently been released from a young offenders' prison, while Ryan is a piano-playing good lad who's moved down south with his dad following his parents' divorce. In Ryan's words, "Don't do cooking but hear it's all about the blend of ingredients. Same with families. Ours is all wrong. Like ice-cream and cabbage". Despite their marked differences, the teenagers do have something in common — they're both dyslexic, but have very different ways of dealing with it. Tommy's journey through handling prejudice against his criminal past ("a single bad decision doesn't make you bad") and learning to read is gripping, moving and - ultimately - uplifting, as is Ryan's dedication to teaching Tommy to read. As Ryan's mum announces her plan for them to move, and Tommy discovers long-buried family secrets, the perfectly-paced plot ramps up the stakes, with plenty of humour and touching moments shining through the boys' troubles.

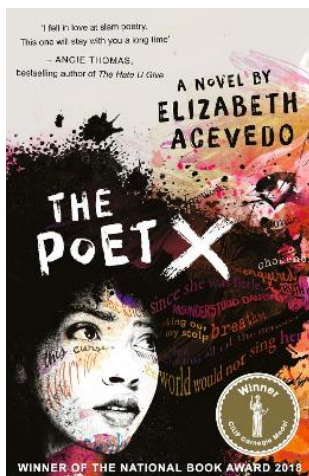


HappyHead

Author: Josh Silver **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 16/03/2023

Shortlisted for the YA Book Prize 2024 An epidemic of unhappiness has swept the UK and infected teenagers. Seb wants to make his family proud and show the world what he's capable of, but his head just won't let him. So, when he's offered the chance to attend a radical retreat that aims to eradicate teen unhappiness, he jumps at the offer. Maybe this is his chance of a new future. As assessments, tests and tasks start to grow increasingly strange though, Seb starts to wonder if all is as it seems. A growing relationship with enigmatic Finn only makes him question the system, and himself, further. An exhilarating, action dystopia in the vein of *The Hunger Games* or *The Maze Runner*, but with a distinctly modern twist that gives it a contemporary, topical feel. Silver's writing is immersive to the extreme, I simply couldn't look away from the page at some points. The reader soon realises that something is amiss at the retreat; creating a taut thriller sense of tension, as we, alongside Seb, try to work out just what is going on. Echoes of Silver's other career as a mental health nurse can be heard throughout the novel, there's a raging anger about the state of mental health provision, and a quiet passion for the care and wellbeing of young people. As well as making your heart race, this is a book that will make your brain think and question. Seb's growing relationship with Finn adds a tender element to the tense storyline. Their growing attraction and the salvation they find in each other builds beautifully, leaving the reader

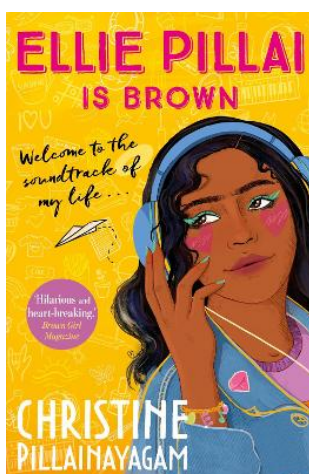
fiercely cheering for them. Make sure you have time in your diary before opening this book, once you start reading you won't be able to stop. And you'll be left panting for book two!



The Poet X

Author: Elizabeth Acevedo **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 01/05/2018

Winner for the CILIP Carnegie Medal 2019 | Highly Commended in the UKLA Book Awards 2019 | Winner of the 2018 National Book Award Xiomara Batista is a Harlem teenager whose parents moved to the US from the Dominican Republic. She has plenty of thoughts, plenty to say, but she's been rendered voiceless by her domineering mother, by religion, and by the boys and men who objectify her body. She gets "all this attention from guys/but it's like a sancocho of emotions... partly flattered they think I'm attractive, partly scared they're only interested in my ass and boobs". Such is the experience of many young women, but for Xiomara this is exacerbated by racism and her judgmental religious community, and powerfully expressed in her inimitable narrative voice. Talking of which, through the sexual insults, and despite her mother's meting of cruel punishments, Xiomara does find her voice. She keeps a secret notebook of poems, and dreams of joining a slam poetry club. And she finds love too, with Trinidad-born Aman, a compassionate young man with family heartache of his own. Xiomara's descriptions of their burgeoning relationship are stunning, evoking first love and passion in all its visceral beauty. Somehow, Xiomara pulls herself free from a mire of obstacles. She stands tall, she burns bright - a wondrously authentic character who finds her own faith through writing poetry. Highly recommended for fans of Nicola Yoon, Angie Thomas and Sarah Crossan, this is a dazzlingly affecting feat.

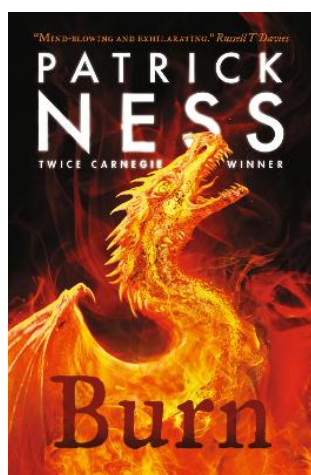


Ellie Pillai is Brown

Author: Christine Pillainayagam **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 05/05/2022

Winner of The Branford Boase Award 2023 | May 2022 Debut of the Month | Shortlisted for the Jhalak Children's & Young Adult Prize 2023 Navigating loss, love and family strains while standing out as a brown girl in a predominantly white school isn't easy for Ellie, a budding songwriter and music aficionado. A beautiful, funny ode to finding the strength to sing up and stand out, Ellie Pillai is Brown is sure to chime with readers who also feel they don't quite fit in, with QR codes peppered through the book bringing Ellie's songs to life, and adding extra depth to the experience. Ellie Pillai is a girl who know what she loves — music. And, against her parents' wishes, she's set on making a go of her drama GCSE, determined to find a way to overcome feeling invisible. While her family are mourning the loss of her little brother,

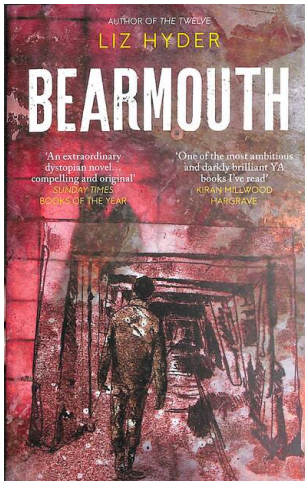
which has left Ellie and her mum terribly distant from each other, Ellie has the stable support of her best friend. But her life is well and truly shaken up when a new boy and his twin sister arrive at her school. While handsome Ash is the only person who gets all her music references and understands the power of a playlist and finding the right song for every situation, it looks like he's hooked up with her best friend, so Ellie tries to put him out of her mind. At the same time, Ellie's new drama teacher instils her with confidence: "I think you have presence, something special about you. Something different". If only Ellie can stop putting herself in a box and making herself small. Exploring grief, consent, family expectations, self-confidence, first love, same sex love and mental health through its well-drawn cast of characters, Ellie Pillai is Brown strikes a smart balance between humour and emotion.



Burn

Author: Patrick Ness **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 06/05/2021

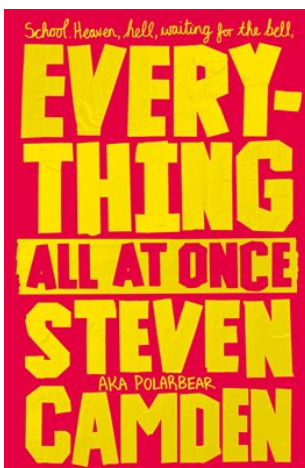
Longlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2021 Double Carnegie winning Patrick Ness proves yet again how effortlessly he can weave a tale that juggles apocalyptic themes and astonishing action with the truly personal sphere of beliefs and actions while dealing with issues as powerful as racism, homophobia and the morality of war and underlaying it all with deeply tender stories of love. Sarah Dewhurst, finds herself at the centre of an age-old prophecy about humans and dragons, as revealed to her by Kazimir the sardonic Russian Blue dragon hired by her father in a last-ditch attempt to save their farm from bankruptcy. She also learns that an assassin is heading her way, sent by Believers who want the world emptied of human obstacles to the dragons' dominance. Malcolm, the putative assassin, was raised from childhood in the cult and his evangelical determination to carry out his mission is matched only by his internal regrets for the life that he might have had. The plot twists and turns and grips the reader in a vice and the multiple perspectives, including the FBI agents on Malcolm's trail, create an intense and captivating reading experience. Every character is given nuance and depth, even the extremely unpleasant Deputy Kelby has a recognisable psychology. There are no long pages of exposition, the writing is as spare and beautifully crafted as we have come to expect and yet the world building is entirely credible as well as fascinating. While the book stands satisfactorily concluded there is a tempting suggestion of more to come and I am sure all readers would anticipate this as avidly as I do. Highly recommended.



Bearmouth

Author: Liz Hyder **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 10/10/2024

October 2019 Debut of the Month | Longlisted for the Branford Boase Award 2020 Told in narrator Newt's distinctive phonetic English, this dark debut dazzles with originality and delivers a potent case for combatting inequality. Bearmouth is home to a grim mining business, where men and children labour under inhumane conditions to make their Master wealthy. They work under the earth, under the omniscient Mayker who - so workers are told - "sen us down into the dark Earf/To atone for the sins o our forefarvers an muvvers". Naïve Newt hasn't seen daylight in years, but takes pride in being taught to read and write by fatherly Thomas, blithely accepting this lot until the arrival of new boy Devlin. Devlin's talk of "revolushun" makes Newt feel that things are "unravellin slowly slowly lyke a bootlayce comin all undun." Life in Bearmouth is beyond bleak, but the sparks of Devlin's revolutionary spirit catch light and drive Thomas to ask the Master for "more coinage" for the workers, to question why they must pay for essential clothes, to demand to know when the promised safety lamps are coming. Then when tragedy strikes, Newt too realises that things "ent bloody well ryte" and takes on Devlin's insurgent tendencies, with explosive effects. Emotionally engaging, this searingly original novel about standing up to abuses of power and fighting for freedom is radiant with story-telling excellence.



Everything All at Once

Author: Steven Camden **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 12/07/2018

Longlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2020 | Winner of the CLIPPA 2019 | One of our 2018 Books of the Year These poignant, punch-packing poems explore the varied emotional lives of secondary school pupils facing the giddy transition from being "the biggest to the smallest...in the secondary school jungle" like "gazelles in a field full of lions". Complex tangles of feelings are laid bare with heart-rending authenticity, from the headiness of he-said-she-said gossip, to the bewildering "who the hell do you sit with?" loneliness that strikes when your best friend's off school (Thanks a lot, Belinda).

Vending Machine is an incredible piece of writing, encapsulating the anguish and anger of betrayal, of having your heart trampled on, and then the bliss of recovery when your heart feels "a little lighter". Another personal favourite is the sublime Dear Mum, BTEC about a student "drawing different plans" after realising they are ill-suited to exams - plans they hope will make Mum proud. There are jubilant themes too, such as the breathless, time-stopping "WHAM!" of instant attraction, the jangling joy of being at the bottom of a celebratory pile-on after you've scored, and the magic of those inspirational, unforgettable teachers who take time to share a book they think you "should try". A chorus of entertaining,

emotionally-charged insights and observations sing and dance through these tender, playful pages, with each short verse alive with empathetic, true-to-life experiences.



Babushka

Author: Natasha Devon **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 05/10/2023

October 2023 YA Book of the Month Thought-provoking, gripping, and shot-through with the warmth of a Welsh cwtch (that's a hug with the clout to make pretty much anything feel better), Natasha Devon's *Babushka* is YA fiction at its finest. Prequel to *Toxic*, though it's satisfying as a perfectly-formed novel in its own right, this had me reading long after the lights should have gone out, and that's no word of a lie. Following a young woman's rocky road to selfhood, *Babushka* explores first love, first sex and family bonds with remarkable wit. Add to that the compassion and empathy with which it tackles toxic masculinity, toxic female friendship, teenage pregnancy, and complex mother-daughter bonds, and this amounts to an outstanding triumph. The set-up of 16-year-old Cerys leaving her rural Carmarthenshire hometown to go to art college in London is deftly done. Her Welsh community and family couldn't be more authentically conjured, and neither could Cerys' giddy fear, excitement, and thrill at staying with awesome Auntie Wyn ("I read books, I smoke cigarettes, I know things"). At college, Cerys is made to feel like a tiny fish in huge, hostile ocean. Her accent and clothes are mocked. She's instantly cast as a dumb, childish outsider by her snobby, rich Chelsea peers. Then everything changes in the wake of being invited to a party by said snobby, rich Chelsea peers. Rarely has young adulthood been so brilliantly portrayed — the dreams, dashed hopes, and almost-unbearable decisions. And that cwtch moment when it feels like everything might just work out OK.



Unraveller

Author: Frances Hardinge **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 31/08/2023

Frances Hardinge always produces books that are very readable and fascinating in equal measure. Her newest *The Unraveller* is exactly that – set in a strange culture where a race of spider like creatures, the Little Brothers, have given the citizens of Raddith the ability to cast a curse on the people they hate. These curses can be quite mild or could be horrific – turning a child into a cloud for instance. Kellen is the only person who can 'unravel' curses – in the way one would unravel a piece of cloth, gathering all the threads together and un-weaving them. Kellen has a strong temper he can't control, and after annoying his latest client he is only rescued from prison by a strange one-eyed horseman who offers a job in exchange for his protection. Having little option, Kellen accepts,

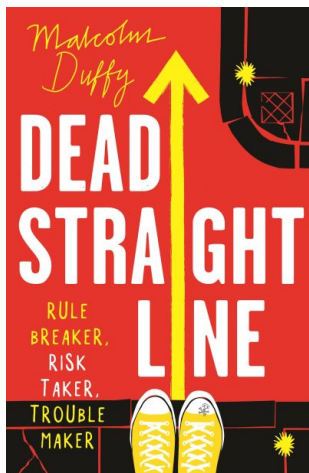
he is accompanied by Nettle, his long-time companion since he rescued her from a curse as a heron. Together they set off, an odd, assorted group, to try to find a secret organisation, to stop the cursing that goes on. Throughout this the characters of the protagonists are tried in many ways – physical and mental, their courage is tested, their friendships tried to the very limits. The plot contains wonderful characters, some strange and violent reveals, and a fair bit of blood and violence. It grabs you from the start due to the strangeness of the world and the intrigue hidden here. Kellen is not always likeable, but he does try, Nettle is wonderfully loyal and level-headed, and their friendship goes through different cycles as they adventure together. There is a fairy-tale/myth feel to much of the story – but due to the subject matter, the dark and twists of the plot, plus its occasional violence it must be recommended for teens – and it definitely is heartily recommended.



Play

Author: Luke Palmer **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 05/10/2023

The second novel from this Branford Boase shortlisted author certainly lives up to the promise of his debut *Grow*. Apart from the deliberately anonymous first page, the story is narrated by three voices: Matt, Mark and Luc. Each voice is unique and distinctive and they vividly describe the lives of four young boys growing up in a small town in England, negotiating friendship, school and family and each desperate to get out and find freedom. They play games, scoring points off each other, anything to break the boredom. But Mark gets involved in a very dangerous game and his drug dealing will have consequences for them all. Undoubtedly the author's teaching experience contributes to this subtle, yet powerful, examination of adolescent male friendships, the influence of father figures or the lack of them and to consider some quite weighty themes including drugs, sexuality and toxic masculinity. These characters are real flawed human beings who learn and grow and as readers we can feel compassion for their poor decision making, as well as hoping for their redemption. Teen books with realistic male protagonists are rare and when they are as good as this they need to be treasured.



Dead Straight Line

Author: Malcolm Duffy **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 09/04/2026

April 2026 Book of the Month Exploring risk, trust, guilt, forgiveness, intergenerational bonds, bravery, and why some people consider consequences while others don't, Malcolm Duffy's *Dead Straight Line* is an authentically-voiced, multi-layered treasure that'll engage hard-to-please teenagers, and spark valuable discussion in classroom contexts. "I don't have trouble finding trouble. It finds me. I used to go looking for it. Not anymore. I've got more trouble now than I know what to do with". Sixteen-year-old Rory is the thrill-seeking, rule-breaking leader of his gang of friends: "In a world of boring, I want breath-taking, bum clenching. I want to get into my discomfort zone". Playing *Dead Straight Line* is just one of the things Rory and his mates do for thrills. The game involves getting home in a dead straight line, never veering from the line, no matter where it leads. One night, the game goes horribly wrong when Rory pressures new recruit Yell into playing for the first time, with lifechanging consequences for both boys. From a thirst for thrills, through the struggles of righting wrongs, navigating lies and betrayal, and forming beautiful new bonds (truly, Rory's relationship with eighty-year-old Geordie Falklands veteran, Tanker, is a joy), Rory's journey is utterly gripping and true-to-life as *Dead Straight Line* explores how there's always a way to get back on track, no matter how winding a course that track might take.
