

booktrust



# best book guide





**Booktrust has reviewed many outstanding children's titles over the last 12 months and the 2009 Best Book Guide brings together some of our favourites.**

**These reviews, along with hundreds of other book recommendations for children of all ages, can be found on our website [www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk](http://www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk)**

#### **Booktrust book reviews**

For each book reviewed 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 in which children will enjoy the book, whether they read it themselves, or have it read aloud to them.

**The reviews are grouped into four different age categories**

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

#### **[www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk](http://www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk)**

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 our online illustrators' gallery and, if you are a teacher, access free teaching sequences. There is a monthly competition to win free books and an online writer in residence to discover too.

You can search our extensive online database of book reviews by age range, as well as by genre.

## about booktrust

**Booktrust is an independent charity dedicated to encouraging people of all ages and cultures to engage with books. The written word underpins all our activity and enables us to fulfil our vision of inspiring a lifelong love of books for all.**

Our national offers include bookgifting programmes, and prizes and awards that recognise and celebrate outstanding literature. Our aims are to build confidence and inspire children, young people and adults to discover and re-discover a love of books.

Through our targeted resources and campaigns, Booktrust seeks to ensure that every child and adult has the opportunity to experience the delight and power of books and the written word, regardless of culture, language, literacy skills or disability.

**Visit [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk) to find out more about our work relating to children's books:**

**Bookstart** [www.bookstart.org.uk](http://www.bookstart.org.uk)

**Booktime** [www.booktime.org.uk](http://www.booktime.org.uk)

**Booked Up** [www.bookedup.org.uk](http://www.bookedup.org.uk)

**Letterbox Club** [www.letterboxclub.org.uk](http://www.letterboxclub.org.uk)

**Children's Book Week** [www.childrensbookweek.org.uk](http://www.childrensbookweek.org.uk)

**Children's Laureate** [www.childrenslaureate.org.uk](http://www.childrenslaureate.org.uk)

**Everybody Writes** [www.everybodywrites.org.uk](http://www.everybodywrites.org.uk)

**The Big Picture** [www.bigpicture.org.uk](http://www.bigpicture.org.uk)

**Booktrust Early Years Awards** [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)

**The Roald Dahl Funny Prize** [www.roalddahlprize.org](http://www.roalddahlprize.org)

**Blue Peter Book Awards** [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)

**Booktrust Teenage Prize** [www.bookheads.org.uk](http://www.bookheads.org.uk)

# 5 years and under





## Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes

**Written by Mem Fox**  
**Illustrated by Helen Oxenbury**

Babies may be born in different countries, look a little different and have different needs, but one thing that most have in common are ten fingers and ten toes. This is the uniting theme, and rhyme, of this perfect first book for sharing.

From the swaddled newborn to children sitting alone, then crawling together and then standing, the illustrations show babies born all over the world in the country and cities, all with irresistibly chubby fingers and toes.

The encouragement and potential for the reader to interact with their baby while reading aloud is obvious, and when the tale turns to the baby that is 'mine, all mine' and supplies a final, surprise extension to the 'ten little toes' rhyme, the opportunity for bonding is made perfect.

**Reading Age: 6+**  
**Interest Level: 9 months +**  
**Publisher: Walker Books**



## The Bog Baby

**Written by Jeanne Willis**  
**Illustrated by Gwen Millward**

Two little girls go walking in bluebell wood and rescue a Bog Baby. They make the small creature a beautiful home in a bucket, tickle him and feed him cake crumbs.

Despite the girls' care and attention, the Bog Baby gets sick, so they confide in their mother, who isn't cross as they had feared, but tells them they must let their Bog Baby go back to the wild. Although they want to keep him, such is their love for him that they set him free.

The illustrations in this book are exquisite – the small, blue Bog Baby is particularly appealing. This is a picture book to treasure.

**Reading Age: 6+**  
**Interest Level: 2+**  
**Publisher: Puffin**

> *The Bog Baby* won a 2008 Booktrust Early Years Award. Find out more at [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)



## Mr Big

Written and illustrated by Ed Vere

Poor Mr Big, he's so big and scary-looking that when he gets on the bus everyone gets off. This makes him unhappy and lonely as no one sees the real him.

One day, he sees an old piano in a shop window; it also looks unhappy and alone, so he buys it and begins to play.

The notes of Mr Big's music drift into the crowded city night and everyone is enchanted – who is this wonderful musician? Mr Big gets invited to join a band and suddenly, in his element, the real Mr Big shines through.

With its gruff hero, vibrant, strong colours, bold design and spare text, this story about looking beyond appearances has a satisfying punchy simplicity and jazzy feel.

**Reading Age: 5+**  
**Interest Level: 3+**  
**Publisher: Puffin**

> Find out more about Ed Vere and Mr Big at [www.booktime.org.uk](http://www.booktime.org.uk)



## Colin and the Snoozebox

Written and illustrated by Leigh Hodgkinson

This is a story about a journey to happiness. Imaginative, peopled by funny characters, and rich in lively language, it offers delightful visual and verbal zaniness.

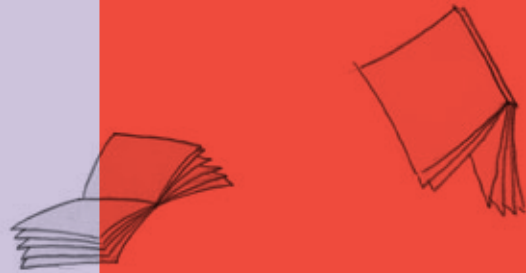
Colin the busy independent cat lives wild. But with no soft cushion to snuggle down on he misses having a home of his own at snooze-time.

By the time tired Colin comes across a cardboard box he's glad to have a place to sleep.

Oops! Soon he has been packaged up and sent on a national, global and galactic postal tour. Each time the box arrives at a new address the recipient is most unfriendly – until, that is, it finally arrives at Grandma Flapjack's house.

Combinations of scanned textures, line work and hand-lettering add to the playfulness of this special book.

**Reading Age: 6+**  
**Interest Level: 4+**  
**Publisher: Orchard Books**



5 to 8 years



**Reading Age: 8+**  
**Interest Level: 4+**  
**Publisher: HarperCollins**

> Read an interview with Oliver Jeffers at [www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk](http://www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk)

## The Great Paper Caper

**Written and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers**

Once upon a time in a forest, many creatures lived happily alongside one another and in harmony with nature, until one day something very strange happened.

Branches began to disappear from the trees but, despite careful and thorough investigation, no one could work out what was going on, until an eye-witness spotted a crucial piece of evidence.

In this unusual book, the forest dwellers team up to discover who is threatening their environment, but when the culprit is apprehended they generously offer their support in helping him solve a difficult problem.

This is an intelligent and entertaining picture book, with unique and fascinating illustrations. It carries a topical ecological message and includes added extras such as instructions for making paper aeroplanes.



## Manfred the Baddie

**Written and illustrated  
by John Fardell**

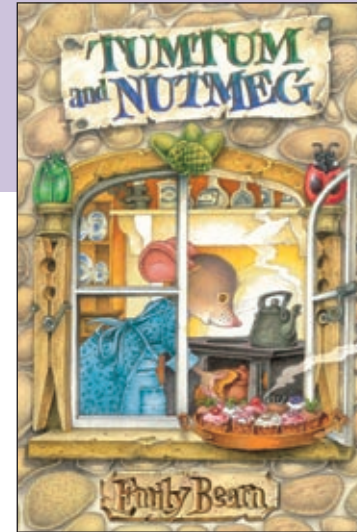
Manfred the Baddie is really bad. He and his gang kidnap brilliant inventors and force them to create outrageous machines for fiendish raids, audacious robberies and piracy on the high seas. Manfred is also an unpleasant, bullying boss.

So when Manfred gets a cold and nobody brings him soup, mops his brow or reads to him, it dawns on him that no one actually wants him to get better. When Manfred realises that being a goodie makes him much more popular, he becomes a reformed character, most of the time...

Cartoon-style illustrations complement this funny story of the triumph of good over evil, with a satisfyingly impish final twist.

**Reading Age: 7+**  
**Interest Level: 4+**  
**Publisher: Quercus**

> *Manfred the Baddie* was shortlisted for the 2008 Roald Dahl Funny Prize. Find out more at [www.roalddahlprize.org](http://www.roalddahlprize.org)



## Tumtum and Nutmeg

**Written by Emily Bearn  
Illustrated by Nick Price**

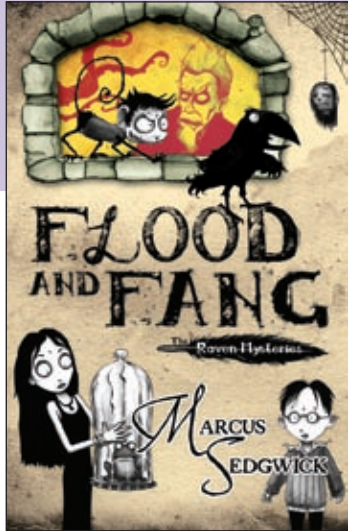
Arthur and Lucy Mildew live in Rose Cottage with their absent-minded father. Within the cottage's skirting boards lies Nutmouse Hall, the grand home of two contented mice called Nutmeg and Tumtum.

When the kind mice realise the state of disrepair of their human neighbours' home, they turn into fairy godparents and do what they can to clean, mend and provide.

But then disaster strikes when Aunt Ivy comes to stay, and soon it is the mice who are in need of help.

This well-judged story of a doll's-house-sized world coming to life is very appealing. The laughter induced by the retired General Marchmouse and his troops in the battle of Nutmouse Hall ensures that the tale avoids becoming twee.

**Reading Age: 7+**  
**Interest Level: 5+**  
**Publisher: Egmont**



**Reading Age: 8+**  
**Interest Level: 7+**  
**Publisher: Orion**  
**Children's Books**

## Flood and Fang: The Raven Mysteries

**Written by Marcus Sedgwick**  
**Illustrated by Pete Williamson**

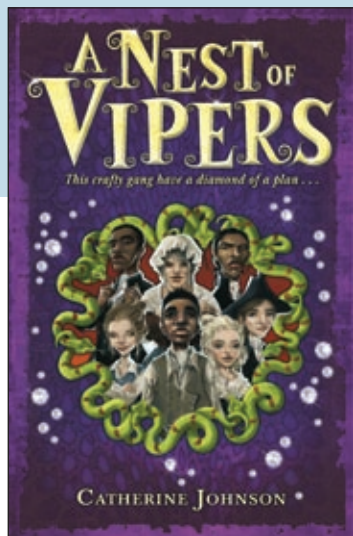
Strange things happen in Castle Otherhand, which isn't surprising given its eccentric inhabitants. Lord Valevine spends his time performing experiments on frogs, his wife Minty prizes her baking tins almost as highly as her children, and ten-year-old Cudweed tears around the castle with his annoying pet monkey, Fellah.

Teenage beauty Solstice is the castle's kindly voice of reason. Along with the family's all-seeing pet raven Edgar (who rather despairingly narrates the story), she helps avert disaster when kitchen maids begin to disappear and the castle mysteriously begins to fill with water...

The first in a mystery series for younger readers, this tale is enhanced by quirky illustrations of the gothic Otherhand family; Edgar's grumpy narration is sure to delight as well.



# 9 to 12 years



## A Nest of Vipers

Written by Catherine Johnson

We meet Cato Hopkins in Newgate Prison in September 1712, on the morning of the day he is due to be hanged for fraud.

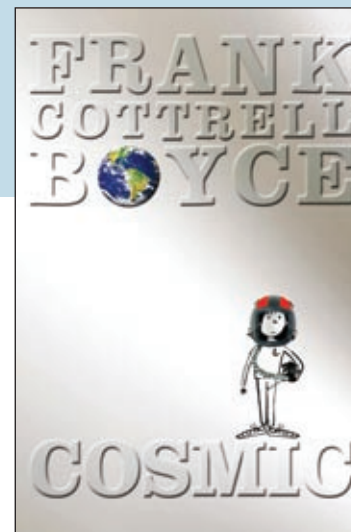
Cato is a boy criminal, part of Mother Hopkins' adopted family. As he relates the story of how he came to be on the verge of paying for his sins with his life, Cato takes us on a journey through the underworld of eighteenth-century London.

Poverty, slavery and social injustice are just a few of the issues touched upon by Cato, but this is not a sad story.

On the contrary, a lively writing style, plenty of humour and the bad guys getting their comeuppance make this a great read for both boys and girls.

**Reading Age: 10+**  
**Interest Level: 9+**  
**Publisher: Corgi Children's Books**

> Read an interview with Catherine Johnson at [www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk](http://www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk)



## Cosmic

Written by Frank Cottrell Boyce

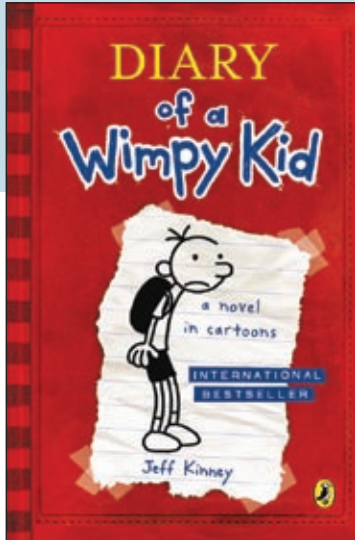
Even though he's only 12, Liam is constantly mistaken for an adult, but he's still a kid who loves playing computer games and riding rollercoasters. His inquisitive nature and adult appearance often get him into trouble but his dad usually intervenes and helps him avert disaster.

When Liam wins a competition to try out the world's greatest thrill ride, he and his friend Florida are whisked away to Infinity Park in China by the mysterious Dr Drax.

The friends find themselves competing for the chance to be sent into space; soon Liam is playing a grown-up in a situation that his dad can't save him from.

Fantasy is interspersed with reality in this funny and touching story, which ultimately celebrates parents and the love they give.

**Reading Age: 9+**  
**Interest Level: 9+**  
**Publisher: Macmillan Children's Books**



## Diary of a Wimpy Kid

**Written and illustrated by Jeff Kinney**

Greg Heffley is a normal American kid, albeit one with a habit of getting into (and out of) trouble.

His diary, complete with hilarious cartoons, records a year in his life and follows his relationships with his nerdy best friend Rowley, annoying brothers Roderick and Manny and long-suffering parents.

Greg is constantly trying to boost his popularity but his attempts at body-building, cartooning and money-making – all recounted in the same deadpan tone – inevitably fall flat.

This laugh-out-loud book was a New York Times bestseller and is sure to appeal to children on this side of the Atlantic – it will undoubtedly raise a smile from their parents too!

**Reading Age: 9+**  
**Interest Level: 9+**  
**Publisher: Puffin**



## Flood Child

**Written by Emily Diamand**

Lilly Melkun lives in a post-climate-change catastrophic world, centuries in the future. Following the inundation of many areas, Britain has split into autonomous regions, which vie with each other for supremacy. Many of them have lost and now distrust the technological ability of previous centuries.

The bloodthirsty Reavers, akin to Vikings, kidnap the English Prime Minister's daughter, whom Lilly sets out to rescue. As she does, she discovers that none of the warring tribes is totally in the right, and that she might find villains and friends in unexpected places.

Diamand poses many serious questions in her exciting adventure and Lilly is an extremely likable heroine.

**Reading Age: 9+**  
**Interest Level: 9+**  
**Publisher: The Chicken House**

teenage



**Reading Age: 9+**  
**Interest Level: 11+**  
**Publisher: Walker**

> Read an interview with, and exclusive writing tips from, Patrick Ness at [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)

## The Knife of Never Letting Go

**Written by Patrick Ness**

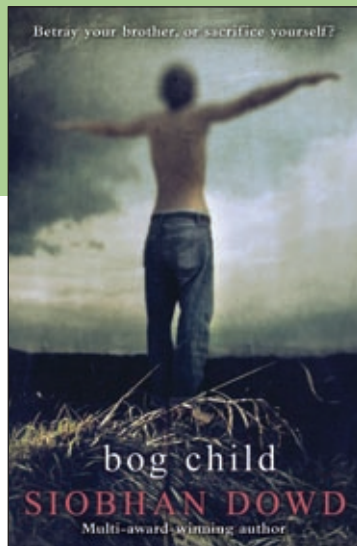
This is Ness' first book for young adults and won the 2008 Booktrust Teenage Prize.

The story begins in a small town where women have been banished and only men remain. Due to a virus, everyone can hear each other's thoughts: 'Noise'.

Todd Hewitt, the last boy in the town, is on the brink of manhood. Forced one day to flee through a nearby swamp, he stumbles upon a patch of silence and – surprisingly – the first girl he has ever seen. Despite their initial mistrust of each other, Todd and Viola team up to evade the men who are chasing him.

As they flee he discovers much about himself, his family, about friendship and about prejudice.

The first in a series, this enthralling sci-fi/fantasy novel grips readers throughout, presenting them with tough questions about identity, ethics and the nature of truth.



## Bog Child

Written by Siobhan Dowd

Northern Ireland in 1981 is a confusing place to grow up. The Troubles are at their height and Fergus' brother is on hunger strike in prison. His parents are always arguing and the world around Fergus seems beset by conflict and unrest.

One day while digging for peat with his uncle, Fergus unearths the body of a perfectly preserved Iron Age girl. As her tragic story unfolds in his dreams, we learn more of his own burgeoning love life and hopes for the future.

This is a beautifully written coming-of-age tale, which deals with themes of mortality, peace and sacrifice. Fergus is an immensely likeable character whose story, along with that of the bog child, will long stay with those who read it.

**Reading Age: 12+**  
**Interest Level: 12+**  
**Publisher: David Fickling Books**



## Chains

Written by Laurie Halse Anderson

Set in New York during the American Revolution, *Chains* tells the story of Isabel and her sister Ruth, sold into slavery to the wealthy, Loyalist, Lockton family.

In the name of freedom, the George Washington-supporting Patriots are fighting the British-supporting Loyalists, but Isabel is in search of a more personal freedom and cannot determine which faction is the most likely to help her.

Mrs Lockton is devastatingly cruel to Isabel; with little to rely on, she becomes increasingly attached to Curzon, a slave who has set himself strongly in support of his own master's Patriot cause.

A brilliantly told, exciting story, with a brave and dignified heroine, *Chains* reveals the complexities of this chapter of American history.

The sequel is greatly anticipated.

**Reading Age: 10+**  
**Interest Level: 12+**  
**Publisher: Bloomsbury**



**Reading Age: 12+**  
**Interest Level: 13+**  
**Publisher: Andersen Press**

## The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

**Written by Sherman Alexie**  
**Illustrated by Ellen Forney**

Arnold is from a long line of Spokane Indians living on a reservation. His heritage is serious poverty and all its disadvantages – alcoholism, violence, gambling and precious little hope.

Yet Arnold is an outsider in his community. Artistic and clever, he has dreams and ambition, and wants to forge his own way. And he does so, transferring to a school full of ‘white, racist, redneck, smart jocks’.

The story suggests that, if we are determined, we can all escape disadvantage and even find joy – through pictures, stories, knowledge and humour.

It shows that family and friendships are important, but that sometimes individuals need to step out of their community to achieve their potential.

This book is entertaining, accessible, affirming and wise. Outstanding.

**Here are some more books we have enjoyed reading over the last few months; visit [www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk](http://www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk) to see the full reviews.**

### > 5 years and under

**Dogs by Emily Gravett (Macmillan)**

Scruffy dogs and smart dogs, stropky dogs and sobby dogs all make appearances in this beautifully illustrated book.

**Elephant Wellyphant by Nick Sharratt (Alison Green Books)**

A spotty unwelliphant and a chocolate caramelepant are among the unusual elephants in this bold, fun and expressive book.

**Dandylion by Lizzy Finlay (Red Fox)**

This lively and poignant picture book celebrates friendship, diversity and the joy of a world enriched by extraordinary individuals.

**My First Nursery Stories by Tony Ross (Andersen Press)**

Eight classic children’s stories come to life with fresh and funny illustrations – perfect for reading aloud.

### > 5 to 8 years

**The Story Blanket by Ferida Wolff and Harriet May Savitz, illustrated by Elena Odriozola (Andersen Press)**

A fable-like, illustrated tale about sharing – and the never-ending unravelling and remaking of stories.

**Traction Man Meets Turbo Dog by Mini Grey (Jonathan Cape)**

Tongue-in-cheek action adventure told in a comic-strip style.

**Mr Gum and the Dancing Bear by Andy Stanton (Egmont)**

This fifth book about the thoroughly unpleasant Mr Gum was winner of the 2008 Roald Dahl Funny Prize.

**Beryl Goes Wild by Jane Simmons (Orchard Books)**

An endearing tale of friendship and adventure and a valuable lesson in not judging a pig by its whiskers.

## > 9 to 12 years

### **Amazing by Hilary McKay (Barrington Stoke)**

Easy-to-read text with plenty of funny illustrations; perfect for reluctant readers.

### **Silverfin: The Graphic Novel by Charlie Higson, illustrated by Kev Walker (Puffin)**

The hundreds of frames in this book are an accomplished labour of love – a must for James Bond fanatics.

### **Toby Alone by Timothée de Fombelle (Walker)**

This exciting adventure has a serious message about the wisdom of using up the Earth's resources.

### **Just Henry by Michelle Magorian (Egmont)**

Film fanatic Henry lives in post-war England with his fractured family; the revelations about his past become part of a story as gripping as any film.

## > teenage

### **Apache by Tanya Landman (Walker)**

A fascinating view of the Native American struggle as seen through the eyes of Siki, an orphan of the Apache tribe.

### **Bedlam by Ally Kennen (Marion Lloyd Books)**

Lexi Juby comes to terms with her dysfunctional family and forms an unlikely friendship in this gripping book.

### **The Knife that Killed Me by Anthony McGowan (Definitions)**

Compelling and disturbing, this is a book that will stay with all who read it.

### **The Robber Baron's Daughter by Jamila Gavin (Egmont)**

A thought-provoking book in which *Swan Lake* is a passion for the protagonist and a metaphor for the storyline.



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