



Books for Giving 2020

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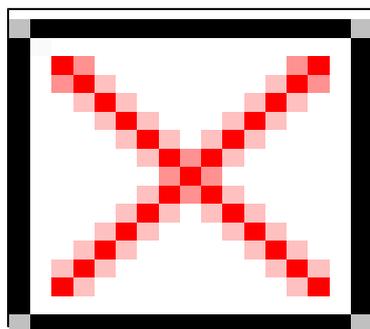
Your indispensable gift guide. Part one.

*What is Christmas for? A time for families, a break from work, for fun, sparkle, old acquaintances new friends, a time to explore, a time to reflect? and yes, of course, a time for presents. What to choose? which books will capture a bit of Christmas and keep it? **Ferelith Hordon** has suggestions.*

Christmas is for... the very youngest

Babies love books. Not just very simple books with one word and one picture, but bright jolly board books with lively illustrations and a text that even tired parents can enjoy. **Mary had a Little Lamb** by Jarvis is a perfect example of this. Follow Mary as she dances across the sturdy pages, basket in hand followed by an ever-growing cavalcade of brightly coloured animals ranging from purple mice to a lovely green crocodile. A simpler text but no less welcome is **That's Not My Polar Bear...** Here even the very youngest can have the pleasure of touch? so important for engagement? as they feel the shiny nose, the rough tongue and finally the lovely soft tummy of the polar bear; the simplest of pictures, a repetitious text and hours of enjoyment. Books for babies must attract their attention. What better way than through sound and light? **Winter Wonderland** sound book with its cheerful snowy scenes filled with action and colour brings the noises of the winterscape into the room at the touch of the little buttons on each page, there for little fingers to discover. No noises in **The Twinkly, twinkly bedtime book**? a gentle storyline and stars that light up every page. Just what might be needed at the end of that exciting day.

Christmas is for ... pictures and stories and joining in



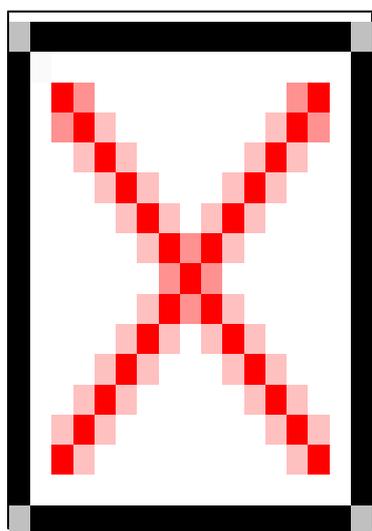
Picture books to delight the eye, stories to engage a young listener (or even an old one), these are real treats to find under the tree. **The Best Kind of Bear** by Greg Gormley and David Barrow is one; a gentle story, on the face of it simple but cleverly blurring the real world and the imaginative as Bear visits the library to find out what sort of bear he is. Luckily Nellie (and the young reader) has the answer. This is picture book that will bear frequent rereading as it becomes a loved favourite. **Wolf in the Snow** by Matthew Cordell picks up this theme of being lost and then found. This almost wordless picture book follows a little girl as she struggles home through the snow. A wolf cub is also struggling alone and lost -they meet. Here the images provide the ingredients for the story inviting not just the child to be the creator but also presenting an opportunity for the parent or an older sibling to be part of this adventure. In **The Button Book** by Sally Nicholls and Bethan Woollvin everyone has to join in as coloured buttons are pressed on each

page. No, there are no technological gadgets ? the invitation is to the imagination and to action; an invitation presented through words, lively design and bold, childlike illustrations. Be careful when you press the Purple Button though - it's the tickle button!

Christmas is for... sharing

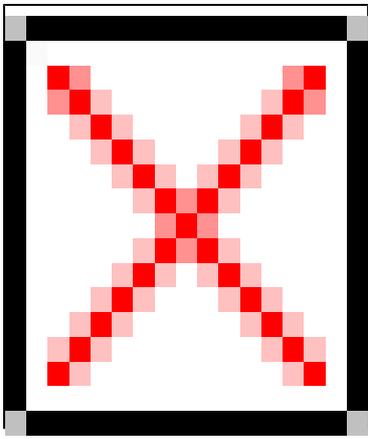
There is nothing more Christmassy than a shared family story time. **Koshka's Tales Stories from Russia** retold and lavishly illustrated by James Mayhew will enchant, carrying each and everyone to meet among others Tsar Saltan, Baba Yaga and Vassilisa the Fair. These are traditional tales to be savoured, widening horizons beyond the more familiar fairytales. For a slightly younger audience Georgie Adams' **Storytime** is perfect. Contemporary language that is a joy to read, a mix of imaginative nonsense and everyday situations packaged with fantastical illustrations by Magda Brol, this collection is a treasure trove and it's a treat to follow Doogle, Cabbage and Buttons as they search for Humbly-Bumbly bees, meet pirates, magicians dragons and more. Sometimes though it is good to meet real people: **Epic Tales of Triumph and Adventure** contains stories that cross the world and cross time. Here we meet familiar faces as well as many that will be unfamiliar. Attractive illustrations accompany a concise text that is informative and easy to understand without being condescending.

Christmas is for ... the imagination



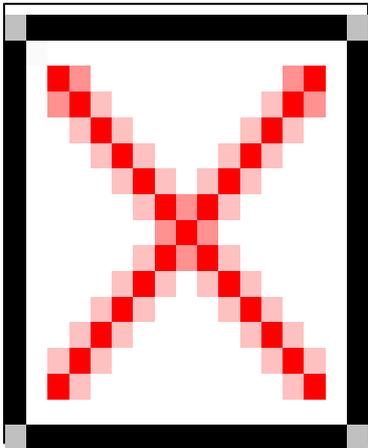
It's **The Night Before Christmas** and Santa's reindeer have landed on the roof in Roger Duvoisin's joyous evocation of this well known poem. Imagination soars to the stars in **How the Stars Came to Be** by Poonam Mistry, each page filled with starlight patterns for that time between picture book and the chapter book. The power of the imagination is at the heart of **Angel on the Roof**. What happens when a lonely boy meets an angel? It is a story that has Christmas at its heart ? warming, delightful, satisfying with a recognisable setting and with exquisite line drawings by Shirley Hughes. Chris Riddell whirls older readers into a different world in **The Guardians of Magic**, where Zam, Phoebe and Bathsheba must use their talents and courage to defeat The Clockmaker and protect the Forever Tree. Here again the illustrations work with the lively narrative to make this an enchanting gift. It is a much colder world in **Frostheart** but there is plenty of action and humour to keep any young reader glued to the page following Ash, as he searches for his lost parents and struggles to use his special gift. Crossing several landscapes Natasha Farrant's **Eight Princesses and a Mirror** consider what it is to be a princess. The storytelling will hold readers' attention and the illustrations by Lydia Corry will ensure a delighted reception. **Hey, Sherlock** is the latest novel to feature the teenage sleuth Garvie Smith. Though Garvie may be a genius he is also a very real anti-hero; someone the reader can imagine as a friend. If Garvie is a teenager for today, so is Jo as she imagines a life for herself that will not be bound by a Chinese takeaway. [Chinglish](#) [3] is fresh, contemporary, funny and full of life ? just what a Christmas present should be.

Christmas is for... familiar faces



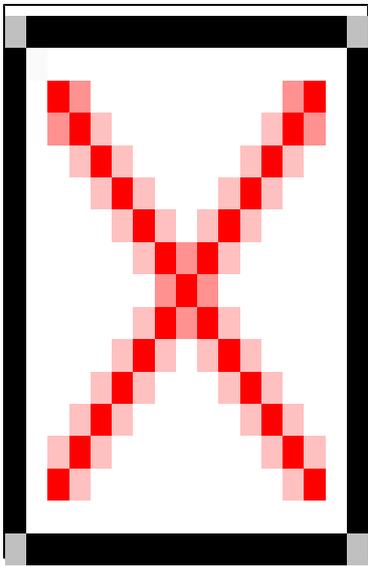
And who could be more familiar than Harry Potter? In **The Goblet of Fire** Jim Kay's artwork bursts off the page, a gift to give on giving. An older favourite, but as welcome, is **Black Beauty** gorgeously illustrated with great realism by Christian Birmingham. **Around the World in Eighty Days** gets a new treatment too at the hands of Antonis Papatheodoulou: reimagined and full of riddles, it instantly engages, and the result is a neat picture book that does not sacrifice the storytelling.

Christmas is for... enquiring minds



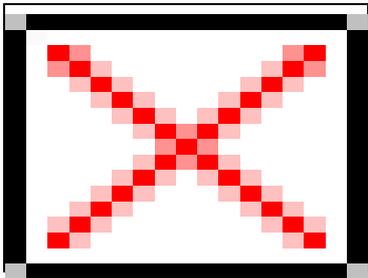
For young readers thirsty for information there is plenty to look out for. Dinosaurs are a sure-fire choice and **The Truth about Dinosaurs** by Guido Van Genechten is an engaging introduction for the youngest, grounded in facts but with a quirky approach. More serious but engrossing and lavishly illustrated is **Life. The First Four Billion Years**. Here this almost unimaginable past is put into perspective intelligently and accessibly. We don't use the sense of smell very much; animals do and **Nose Knows. Wild Ways Animals smell the World** introduces the subject with plenty of interactive flaps to reveal added facts or expand the text; guaranteed to fascinate curious young minds. The world outside the window as described in **What's that ? Garden Birds** will get young birdwatchers twitching as they pocket the identification wheel which allows them to leave this handsome production safe at home.

Christmas is for... poetry



Wonderfully in keeping with the Christmas spirit is **Midnight Feasts**, compiled by A.F. Harrold and illustrated by Katy Riddell. This brings together an eclectic and wide-ranging selection of poems about food, a mouth-watering collection. Just as beautifully presented is **Poems from a Green and Blue Planet**, edited by Sabrina Mahfouz. Again, the selection features contemporary poets as well as those from past and from around the world. This is a gift to excite. Finally, Shakespeare ? following her previous anthologies, Allie Esiri has created **Shakespeare for Every Day of the Year**. This is a gift for the family to share, and everyone will want to find the sonnet, soliloquy or speech matched with their birthday. Beautifully presented and with inspiring introductions to each piece of poetry.

Christmas is for ... reflection



The world turns moving through the year; this is beautifully depicted in **The Hare and the Moon A Calendar of Paintings** in which Catherine Hyde marries her art with the traditions, the wildlife, the names associated with each month ? a calendar to treasure. Illustrators from across the world are represented in **Migrations: Open Hearts Open Borders** and their postcards invite the reader to reflect on what this means today. Which brings us to the Christmas story. **Leah's Story** by Margaret Bateson-Hill and Karin Littlewood is a retelling of the traditional Nativity set in contemporary Palestine and made accessible to a diverse audience; a Christmas present.

Ferelith Hordon is editor of **Books for Keeps**.

Details of all the books mentioned [can be found here](#) [4].

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