



Books of the Year 2019

Article Author:

[Various Authors](#) [1]

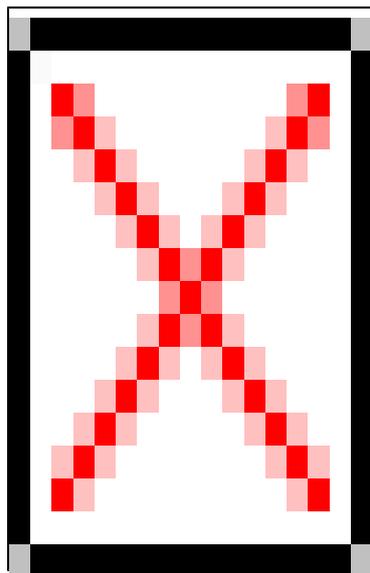
[239](#) [2]

Byline:

BfK contributors choose

This year, our reviewers have read and reviewed over 300 books for Books for Keeps, but that's still just a fraction of the publishing output. Which are the books we'll still be reading in 2020 and beyond? We asked those in the know to choose their books of the year.

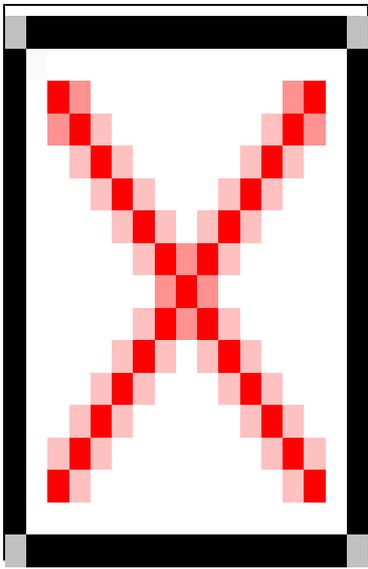
Daniel Hahn is a writer, editor and translator.



In Chris Naylor-Ballesteros's beautifully simple [The Suitcase](#) [3], a creature arrives from far away, after a hard journey but it takes a little while for the other animals to learn to be kind to him. This new picture-book is a much-needed lesson in compassion, subtly taught through a story of lovely, uncomplicated hospitality. And as it happens, so is Oili Tanninen's **Button & Popper**, newly translated from the Finnish by Emily Jeremiah: this describes how the eponymous twins and the rest of their big pixie family find themselves a winter home. It was first published more than 50 years ago, and it shows its age in the gorgeously stylish three colour geometric illustration, the striking design and the roundabout story but it's all the better for that.

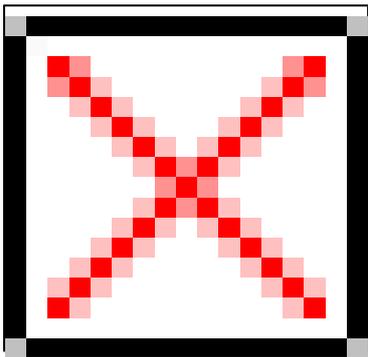
Finally, [Lampie and the Children of the Sea](#) [4], a novel by Annet Schaap, translated by Laura Watkinson, introduces us to Lampie (the nickname comes from her former lighthouse home), who makes a new friend. But because he is a 'monster', Lampie must fight for his rights and his freedom. It's a gripping and magical adventure, rich in fairy-tale elements, not all of them immediately apparent?

Teresa Cremin, Professor of Literacy, Open University



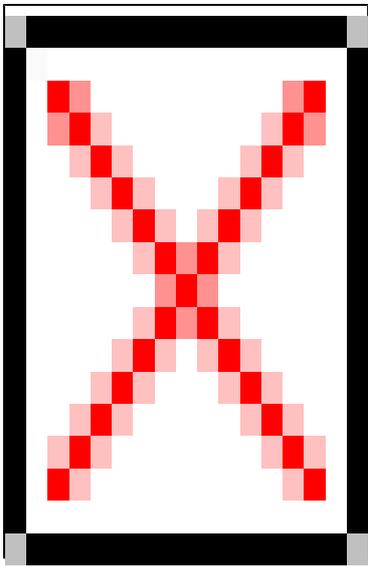
My two front runners this year are [Toffee](#) [5] by Sarah Crossan and **The Runaways** by Ulf Stark, illustrated by Kitty Crowther. Both explore relationships between their young protagonists and an older character - one of whom is a frail stranger with Alzheimer's and the other a hospitalised grandfather. Both involve running away and both hurt. However, the sensitivity with which they are written, the moments of light relief and the tangible connections between the characters help to reduce the pain. Crossan's spare verses draw you in, as do Crowther's childlike illustrations. These are books to keep, they echo in the mind and deserve re reading.

Louise Johns-Shepherd is Chief Executive, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)



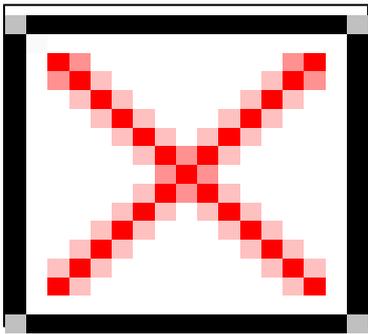
The text of **The Undeclared**, a picture book, is a poem by Kwame Alexander highlighting the important contributions of a wide range of African Americans through history. The elegance of the language and the rhythm of the words are so well suited to a picture book format and when married with Kadir Nelson's heart-stoppingly beautiful illustrations the outcome is an absolutely breathtaking picture book. Every word, brushstroke and blank space is wonderfully placed and you are carried through the book on an emotional rollercoaster to the joyous last page. I defy anyone not to be moved by this book, its words, its pictures and its important and undeniable message.

Darren Chetty is a teacher, doctoral researcher and writer with research interests in education, philosophy, racism, children's literature and hip hop culture.



Zanib Mian's debut Planet Omar Accidental Trouble Magnet is a fast-paced and hilarious tale of Omar, his family, his classmates and his neighbour Mrs Rogers ? ?John, The Muslims are frying smelly onions again!?. Omar loves bike racing and biryani and is the kind of frenetic, curious child to whom all children can relate. Mian's story, illustrated by Nasaya Mafardidik is a masterclass in telling a story of a young Muslim child who survives and thrives in a world where anti-Muslim racism exists. I can't wait to see what Omar gets up to next! (An earlier version of the book, self-published as **The Muslims** won **The Little Rebels Award** 2018.)

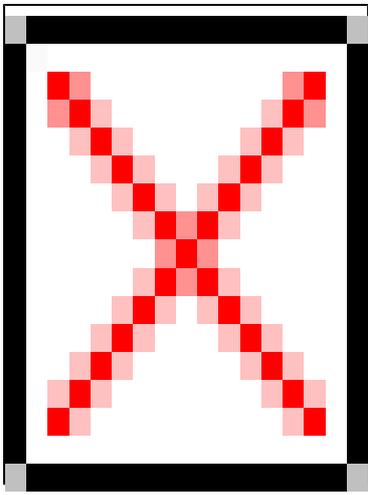
Miranda McKearney is the founder of EmpathyLab



At **EmpathyLab**, we look at books through an empathy lens, thinking they can be used more consciously to build children's perspective taking, and understanding of others. It's easy for an empathy collection to get rather dark, so Emily Gravett's [Cyril and Pat](#) [6] immediately struck a chord. It hilariously exposes our absurd tribal tendency to see the 'other' as threatening, something which desperately needs challenging, in today's divided world.

Cyril is a lonely squirrel, until he meets Pat (a rat). All the park creatures disapprove of their friendship, because 'Pat is not like you and SQUIRRELS CAN'T BE FRIENDS WITH RATS?'. The book has Gravett's hallmark exquisite balance of words and pictures and the pace is brilliant. I especially love the last, harmonious page where the re-united friends are together on a branch against a lemony sky, surrounded by poppies.

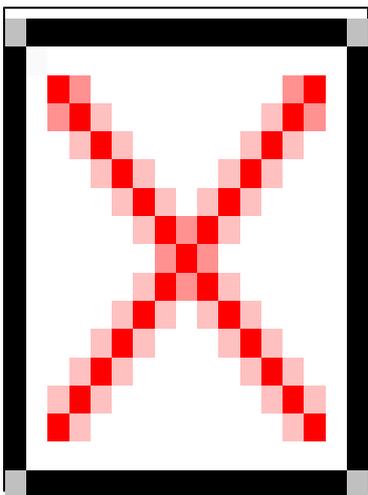
Pam Dix is a former librarian and chair of Ibbby UK.



Corey's Rock by Sita Brahmachari and Jane Ray is very special book, a collaboration between two children's book creators at the height of their powers. Its format is unusual but very pleasing, one that it would be lovely to see more frequently. More text than a normal picture book, more images than a novel of this length, but how well the two work together to tell the story so poetically. It is simple in the telling but deals with complex emotions: bereavement, sadness, displacement, legend. 10-year-old Isla relocates to Orkney with her Scottish mother and African-origin father after the death of her brother and their loss becomes entangled with the local selkie legend. The sense of a life lived at the edge of the land and of the healing power of the sea is what really endeared the book to me. This is beautifully captured in the delicate watercolour illustrations, the wonderful cover and the endpapers.

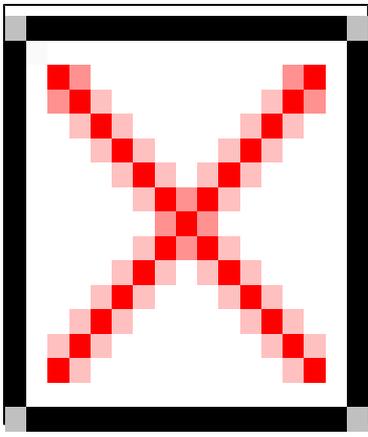
I would briefly like to mention **Bright Sparks ? Amazing Discoveries, Inventions and Designs by Women** by Owen O'Doherty too. This has introducing me to a host of wonderful amazing women who I had never heard about before and who designed things I have never really thought about ? Monopoly, windscreen wipers. It's an endlessly delightful list. And I am thrilled that Knights of are publishing more books by Jason Reynolds whose [Long Way Down](#) [7] was my book of the year 2018.

Fen Coles, Letterbox Library



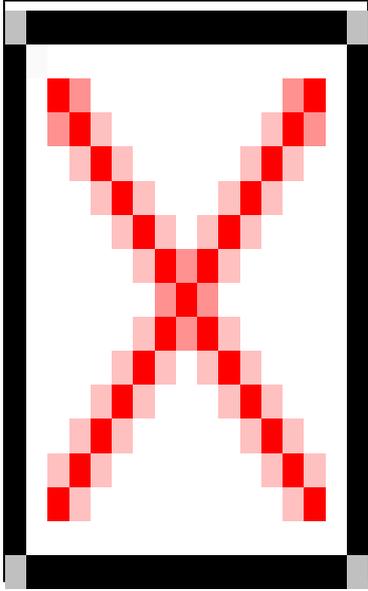
The **Letterbox Library** book of the year is **Child of St Kilda** by Beth Waters and it deserves to be far, far better known. Inspired by the life of John Gillies, the last child ever to be born on the barren archipelago in the outermost Outer Hebrides, this nonfiction narrative layers up and sweeps over much more expansive thoughts, taking in the environment, precious conservation, vanishing ways of life, kinship, community and resilience. An ambitious presentation of a fragile island ecosystem, executed through extraordinary illustrations of mono prints and digital edits, bound into a book which feels lush and luxurious in its care and detail.

Caroline Fielding is a school librarian and chair of CILIP YLG London.



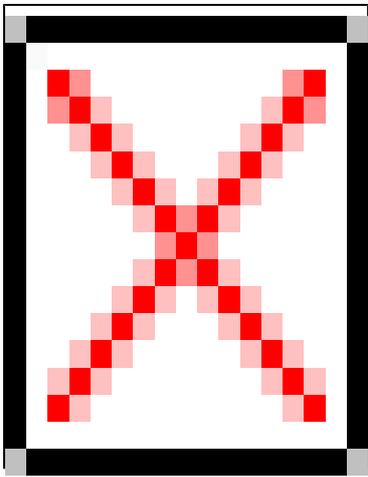
Choosing my book of this year is as hard as choosing **Carnegie Kate Greenaway** nominations, but also an opportunity to mention an absolute fave: **The Deepest Breath** by Meg Grehan is a verse novel about eleven-year-old Stevie, questioning her feelings for a girl, and includes a wonderful librarian. Bali Rai's **Now or Never: a Dunkirk Story** is my favourite historical novel this year. **Kick the Moon** by Muhammad Khan is my top YA, it has such great characters and touches on so many relevant issues. Finally, because my daughter Bea started school this term, my number one picturebook has to be [Lulu's First Day](#) [8]!

Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.



I've chosen **The Odyssey**, text by David Walser and illustrations by the one and only Jan Pienkowski. The best stories ever brought to life by a long-serving duo themselves of rare excellence. More outsize characters but this time all too human in Sharon Dogar's [Monsters](#) [9], the story of how Mary Godwin, later Shelley, came to write **Frankenstein** while coping with an unrelentingly roller-coaster private life And of course Hilary McKay's **The Time of Green Magic**, more evidence that she is the best contemporary children's writer we currently have.

Dawn Finch is a children's author and librarian. She is Trustee of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and Chair of the Society of Authors' Children's Writers and Illustrators Group committee (CWIG).



I must confess to a serious bias when choosing this book because I first had a copy back in 1977. When Usborne said they were going to republish their classic **Ghosts** from the **World of the Unknown** series I was beyond excited. This book was a defining one for me as a child and I can vividly recall the delicious prickly fear of the unknown and the possibilities of *The Things That Go Bump In The Night*. This book had profound effect on me, and I'm delighted to share that with a whole new audience. Republished in Oct 2019, it is every bit as thrilling as it was when I was ten.

Details of all the books mentioned [can be found here](#) [10].

Page Number:

4

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Links:

- [1] <http://edbtjyw.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/various-authors>
- [2] <http://edbtjyw.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/239>
- [3] <http://edbtjyw.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/237/childrens-books/reviews/the-suitcase>
- [4] <http://edbtjyw.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/237/childrens-books/reviews/lampie-and-the-children-of-the-sea>
- [5] <http://edbtjyw.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/236/childrens-books/reviews/toffee>
- [6] <http://edbtjyw.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/232/childrens-books/reviews/cyril-and-pat>
- [7] <http://edbtjyw.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/228/childrens-books/reviews/long-way-down>
- [8] <http://edbtjyw.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/238/childrens-books/reviews/lulu?s-first-day>
- [9] <http://edbtjyw.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/234/childrens-books/reviews/monsters>
- [10] <http://edbtjyw.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/238/childrens-books/articles/the-books-for-keeps-christmas-books-gift-list-2019>