



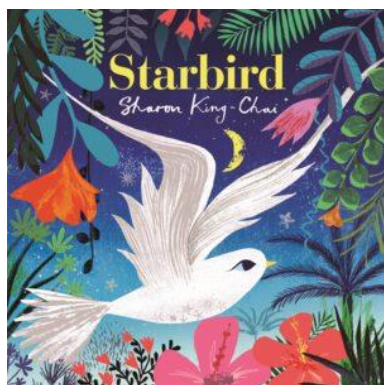
The Bird Within Me by Sara Lundberg (10+)



An artistic glimpse into an artist's life as a child. Berta finds it difficult to fly from her family responsibilities following her mother's illness. Based upon the childhood of Swedish artist, Berta Hansson, the book explores creative freedom and some of the challenges that have to be overcome in gaining this.

The book provides an intense visual experiences and provides readers with shifting perspectives on Berta, her life and her often conflicting sense of priorities concerning her mother's deteriorating health and her own burgeoning interest in art. The way the story draws upon different artistic styles and media is effective and adds to the wide-reaching nature of the story. The emotion captured within the pictures is stunning and there's a sense of unfulfilled longing which captures some of the sadness and grief. The format of the book almost feels like an artist's sketchbook itself adding to the intimacy of the story. A feast for the eyes.

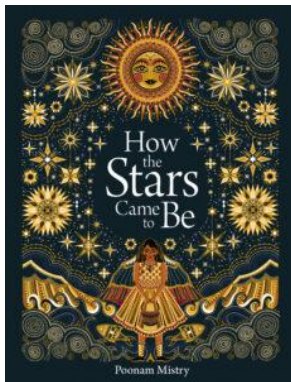
Starbird by Sharon King-Chai (6+)



The traditional tale of the legendary Starbird. After the Moon King traps the Starbird in a cage as a gift for his daughter, its beautiful voice begins to disappear. Join the Starbird on its journey as it battles to escape captivity and bring colour back to its life in this heartfelt story enhanced by creative foiled illustrations.

There is visual splendour in this colourful book, with the shining silver foil providing a thoughtful addition. The animal silhouettes showcase their shape, and clever use of brushstrokes create contrast. The illustrations tell the story thanks to a magical colour palette and inventive use of space. The concept of time is presented well – whole-page spreads slow time down, whilst panel sets speed it up.

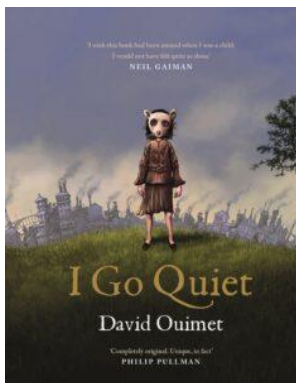
How the Stars Came to Be by Poonam Mistry (5+)



A contemporary creation story which offers new ways of seeing the night sky. A fisherman's daughter worries about her father's return from sea during the darkness. Working with the sun, she seeks to find a solution that will change the night sky forever.

Readers fall into this incredible book where the colour palette and patterning combine to give depth and an infinite feeling to the sky. Every star is individual in this intricate book which uses contrasting and complementary colours to great effect to express daylight and night-time throughout. Fusing traditional art styles from a range of cultures, the artwork feels fresh, and yet, as though it could have been forged an age ago. This is a timeless tale with an impressive scope and style that perfectly captures the awe-inspiring wonder and unbounded nature of the stars and sky.

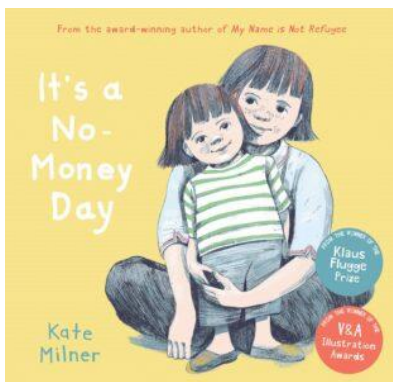
I Go Quiet by David Quimet (10+)



An exploration of what it's like to be quite in an overwhelming world. This story is rich in visuals, creating a claustrophobic and at times terrifying atmosphere which relates the experience of a shy girl. Through the power of books, creativity and imagination, she begins to see a future where her voice will finally be heard.

The judges empathised with the introverted main character and were uplifted by the positive ending and its message of empowerment of this highly original book. Uncomfortable at times, this book brings home the reality of living with shyness and anxiety. The dark and oppressive visuals contrast with the positive text. Uniquely compelling and abstract, this book offers an incredible reading experience.

It's a No-Money Day by Kate Milner (3+)



A poignant story of the day in the life of a young girl and her mum living in poverty. Mum works really hard, but on this day there is no money left and no food in the cupboards. Forced to visit the local foodbank, Mum feels ashamed that they need to rely on the kindness of others. Her daughter however is imaginative and happy in her innocent understanding of their situation.

A deceptively simple yet powerful book. The central theme of poverty is explored and portrayed sensitively through illustrations that subtly highlight what is really happening beyond the child's narration. The naturalistic and simplistic illustrations offer readers two different perspectives in this story which explores the richness of togetherness on a 'no-money day' and the challenges this can provide for parents. The relationship between mother and child is outstandingly portrayed, their love for each other palpable throughout. Rich in detail, with clever use of white space to draw the reader in and body language to depict emotion, this is an important book which will speak to readers of many different ages and experiences.

Hike by Pete Oswald (5+)



This is a beautiful wordless story about a father and child going on a hike together. It is deceptive in its simplicity with a wonderful sense of freedom and fresh air. The textured watercolour illustrations are a treat for the eyes and magically embody the mountains and the forest.

Apart from sound words, this story is told entirely through the illustrations. We see the child packing his rucksack for an exciting hike in the mountains with his father. The stunning illustrations bring out the tension and humour and the colour palette creates a sense of fresh air. The respect for nature and the enjoyment of being out in the open air together is beautifully conveyed and the full range of emotions are displayed on the child's face throughout the story.

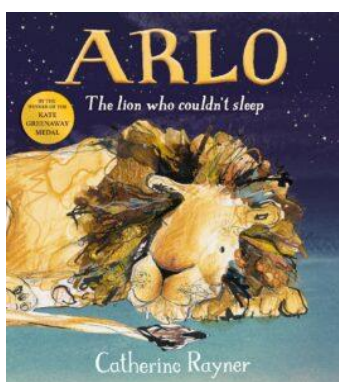
Small in the City by Sydney Smith (5+)



Being small can be overwhelming in a city. People don't see you, the sounds can be scary, and the streets are so busy it can be overwhelming. But, if you know where to find good hiding places, warm dryer vents that blow out hot steam that smells like summer, music to listen to or friends to say hi to, there can be comfort in the city, too.

An ordinary story told in an extraordinary way. Evocative and expressive illustrations perfectly capture the idea of just how it feels to be small in a big, over-powering city, slowly increasing the tension to create an atmosphere of worry and loss. The views and architecture of the city are powerful and cinematic and use the format and height of the book well. This is a book that encourages "active reading" as the reader is able to develop their own interpretations and "find" the story, as evidenced by the emotional yet understated final image. Readers will enjoy repeat readings and will delight in finding new details and perspectives each time.

Arlo The Lion Who Couldn't Sleep by Catherine Rayner (3+)



Arlo the lion is very tired. He just can't get to sleep. When he meets Owl, who can sleep through the day when all the other animals are awake, she teaches him a beautiful melodic song which lulls him into a peaceful slumber.

This enchanting story about Arlo and Owl is enhanced by the glorious illustrations which take us from day to night using subtle shifts in colour. Arlo's shaggy and unruly mane give a magnificence to his character that contrasts with Owl's sleek and majestic lines. The lyrical rhyming of Owl's lullaby is gentle and calming, and contributes to the almost meditative impact of the book. The striking colour palette creates a sense of awe and wonder in the natural world and give the animals a real presence.