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BOOKCHAT

NEWSLETTER

If you wish to pass this newsletter on to others, please feel free to do so.

SELECTED HEADLINES

The
HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARD
remains the oldest and most widely respected
international award in the field of children's literature.

IBBY, the International Board on Books for Young People, has announced that the 2016 winners are:

Author : **Cao Wenxuan** (China)

Cao writes beautifully about the complex lives of children facing great challenges.

Illustrator : **Rotraut Susanne Berner** (Germany)

Children all over the world deserve to be exposed to her brilliant, humane, rich, emotionally true and deeply engaging books.

and the winners of the *IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award 2016* are:

Read With Me (Iran) and **Big Brother Mouse** (Luang Prabang City, Laos)



The ALMA

Boston-born author **Meg Rosoff** has been awarded the prestigious (and lucrative) *Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award*. She has written 7 novels so far, including the young adult stories *How I Live Now* and *Just in Case*. "They speak to the emotions as well as the intellect."



Gcina Mhlophe with Jean Williams

- Biblioref SA celebrated **International Mother Language Day** with a 3-day event, culminating with the launch of *Our Story Magic* and *Stories of Africa* in all 11 languages

(in cooperation with UKZN publishers). Author/storyteller **Gcina Mhlophe** was there to make the occasion a unique event. Full details from jean@biblionefsa.org.za [See review below.]

- There will be a children's component to the (newly established) **Jewish Literary Festival** to be held in Cape Town on 22 May. Details from hipzone@mweb.co.za
- **Harper Lee**, the author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, has died at the age of 89.



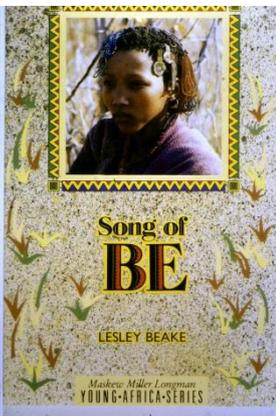
The **Children's Book Network**

- held a workshop for children from the Redhill community, using *The Possibilitree* by Tamlyn Young as their focus. Children dreamed up their own possibilitrees – and danced to music of their dreams. The first CBN workshop in Stanford on “Books and Music” was held recently – a fresh start in another community.
- An eighth Harry Potter book is to be released this summer, containing the script for a new stage play: **Harry Potter and the Cursed Child**. It picks up the story 19 years after Harry was last seen waving his two eldest children off to Hogwarts. Written by JK Rowling, Jack Thorne and John Tiffany, the book is to be published on 31 July by Little, Brown Book Group and will contain the script of the play (in two parts) at early rehearsal stage.

Editorial

Small things make base men proud.

Shakespeare : King Henry VI, Part II



That's me! I'm a lover of small things. When I had to move house last year, I was amazed then horrified at the amount of small things I had accumulated. (Called “clutter” by my less romantic friends.) I won't bore you with fragments of stone from the Himalayas or a plastic moose from Canada or a wooden bookmark from the IBBY Congress 2004. I kept all of them! But I turn my eye on my bookcase where there are also “small things”.

Small in size, such as miniature book of Japanese prints by Hiroshige, a smaller leather-bound *King Lear*, or a truly mini-book of Cheering Thoughts about Tigger. Also small in impact, but (to my mind) worth keeping: My very own copy of *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1956 edition), coming apart at the seams from over-loving reading. A first edition of *The Valley of Adventure* by Enid Blyton (1947). I must have had dozens of first editions because I demanded every new Blyton book (apart, of course, from *Noddy*); this is the only one left. A 1950 edition of *The Sword in the Stone* by T H White with the fight between Merlyn and Madame Mim which was cut out of later editions. A copy of *Two Dogs and Freedom* (Ravan Press 1986), containing all-too-true writings by Children from the Townships reproducing their own handwriting and drawings - which was duly banned because it showed police brutality, among other things. An enormous picture book in glorious colour called *Le Voyage de l'empereur Kankou Moussa* by Jean-Yves Loude, with a full-page signed message from the illustrator Christian Epanya. I met him (and many other African book creators such as Meshack Asare) at the Gothenburg Book Fair in 2010. A dull, cloth-covered first edition of Kipling's *Kim* which I re-read about once a year with joy. A terrifying book about the “Atomic Flash at

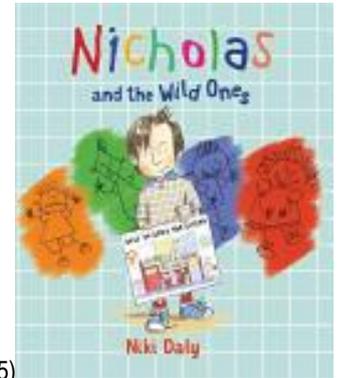
Hiroshima” in Japanese (with a translation) and evocative, beautiful and shattering pictures – given to me in Hiroshima itself.

In themselves, small things. Unimportant items on a crowded bookshelf. With them a number of books personally signed for me by such authors as Katherine Paterson, Philippa Pearce, Brian Doyle, Margaret Mahy, and several by our very own Lesley Beake. I do not feel ‘base’ in being proud of them. They represent meetings with authors I am proud to have met, books that I am proud to have read, often visits to places to which I remain proud to have been invited.

This is all part of the international world of books – created for those ‘small things’ – children.

BOOK REVIEWS

The policy of Bookchat has always been to review all South African books, and the best of those submitted from overseas publishers.



NICHOLAS AND THE WILD ONES written & illustrated by Niki Daly (Jacana 2015)

This picture story-book is much in the same splendid spirit as *No More Kisses for Bernard*. The dedication is “To the Little Boy I once was” and it’s not hard to imagine that Niki is revisiting moments of real childhood – in this case, school bullies. The one who drops on people, the one who steals school lunches, and the Mega Gross one as big as a wrestler. This is the way kids ARE! Family advice doesn’t help much, but there are other ways ... An enjoyable and convincing tale, most effectively conceived in visual terms. (Spot the watchful dachshund.) Great to see Niki back in such vigorous action.

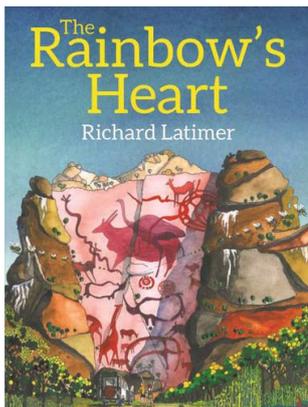
Book Dash are a unique organisation. They gather together suitable participants, create a book in a single day, find sponsorship to produce it – and then give away thousands of copies. Fabulous! Each of these two titles is on the theme of “Identity Search”.

RAFIKI’S STYLE by Louis Greenberg, illustrated by Audrey Anderson, designed by Wesley Thompson (Book Dash 2015)

A soccer hero is *the* hero for the week! This week he may be nothing like yourself; next week you are spot on similar. So Rafiki learns: “I look like me; this style is mine.” Bold bright pictures.

IS THERE ANYONE LIKE ME? by Fred Strydom, illustrated by Jess Jardim-Wedepohl, designed by Stephen Wallace (Book Dash 2015)

An animal a bit like a stubby quagga (with a curly tail) goes looking for a look-alike. The somewhat surprise ending is the positive discovery that: “There’s only one me in the world! I’m special, oh it’s true!” Smooth, easy artwork.

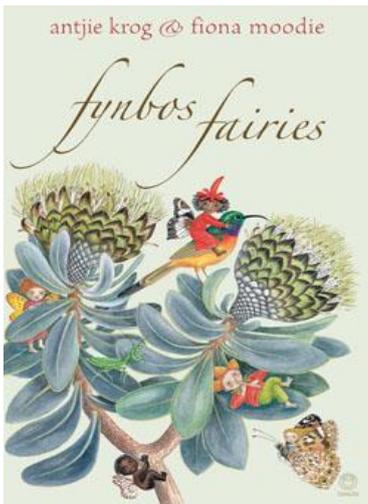


THE RAINBOW’S HEART written & illustrated by Richard Latimer (Bumble Books 2015)

Bewilderingly beautiful – one doesn’t quite know where to focus. The adventure is explained best in the map-like end-papers which portray the journey from monotonous civilisation out into the breadth of fantasised Africa, and the route followed to the weird mountain which hides the Rainbow’s Heart. It’s a story to be followed (and explored) visually, without worrying too much about the brief text (which has a few loose ends in it). From cubic city life, a quick glimpse of the “baddy” slashing away at flowers (horrid memories of *Strewelpeter* or *Scissorhands*), a honeybird guides our two heroes through floral spirals, past a pyramid of packing, and a pageful of border restrictions – and then, wham! A mystical giant baobab and a vast open crimson sky. This has the impact of some Shaun Tan artwork. After that, Richard Latimer dallies with visual patterns and aspects of Africa – with a reminder that the reader/viewer is being invited to play “I Spy” for the wildlife details everywhere. Past a windswept night to a magnificent mountain patterned with rock art designs. Up to the heart of the matter: the queen bee whose bees are dying for lack of honey. Our heroes plant the seeds they brought and flowers bloom instantly and wondrously, as they can do only in magical books like this.

For the young reader, the realisation that bees need flowers is enough to provide motivation and a satisfactory ending. We who are older and wiser may also know that flowers (and fruit) need the bees – and bees in our modern world are increasingly endangered. But one step

at a time. The publisher has “remastered the original illustrations and digitised them” from the 1982 publication by Jonathan Ball so that the artist’s colours are now “wonderfully strong and fresh”. *The Rainbow’s Heart* is exciting proof of how modern technology (and an artistic eye) can enhance a picture book into something stunning.



FYNBOSFEETJIES: Afrikaans verse by Antjie Krog, illustrated by Fiona Moodie; English text by Gus Ferguson under the title **FYNBOS FAIRIES** (Umuzi 2016; first published 2007)

A most welcome re-issue (in soft-cover) of a milestone book in South African children’s literature. Two brilliant imaginations let loose upon our fynbos heritage. I repeat some of my 2007 Bookchat review:

This book is provocative. It is deliberately totally different from the delicate, dainty Wedgewood-coloured, Oh-so-English *Flower Fairies* of Cicely Mary Barker. These South African floral spirits are modern and with-it. The Erica fairies wear jeans and Grandma Geranium smokes a pipe. The naughty boy Stapelia Elf heads (as the flower does) towards the stench of rotting meat. I am told (because I am not sufficiently skilled in the language) that the Afrikaans verses of Antjie Krog are sheer brilliance. I reckon Gus Ferguson found it hard to produce the same pithy word play. The impact of the fifteen ultra-large, highly varied picture pages is magnificent. Some – like the Chinchinchee and Sugarbush – are flower designs on a stylised background. Others – the Disa, the Dew-Vygie, the Strelitzia Dragon – have Cape countryside behind them. Everywhere, for young eyes to discover, are little insects, camouflaged frogs, exquisite birds. Even a container ship floating past the dozy Milkwood fairies. A storming, splendid book.

STORIES OF AFRICA and OUR STORY MAGIC by Gcina Mhlophe, various illustrators (University of KZN Press)

The English versions of these collections of folktales are still available, but the great news is that – thanks to Biblionef – they are now also available in our African languages. Each large-paged, hardcover book (with brightly coloured pictures) contains ten tales retold by our Queen of Storytellers. Read them aloud and they bounce around in mid-air, full of impact, rhythm and enthusiasm.

No girl in this land shall play imbira.

‘No, no, no! I said *no* girl in this land shall play imbira!’

‘Yes, you heard me right. No girl must play imbira.’

So begins “Khethiwe, Queen of Imbira” and Gcina’s version of the girl who *did* play that sacred instrument – and it was the best end of harvest celebration in living memory. Full of genuine Africa and essential on every bookshelf of folklore.

POWERS OF THE KNIFE : *Shadow Chasers*, Book 1 by Bontle Senne (Cover2Cover 2016)

Fascinating! Set in today’s world where the Trouble Gurlz reckon they rule the school and taxi drivers rule much of the rest, Nom has a magic knife which sets her (with her friend Zithembe) in opposition to *the shadows*. They come from the dreamworld where an army of monsters is waiting to break through. With the magic knife and some African magic, the two 12-year-olds find the first of the Shadow Chasers and start what is going to be a vital conflict. Short, agitated prose within a carefully limited vocabulary, this is strong scary stuff. Written for upper primary readers, with clear print, a few helpful drawings and an eye-catching cover.

TAKING CHANCES by Sicelo Kula (Cover2Cover 2016)

10th in the “Harmony High” series

I admire this teenage series for several reasons. They are well-designed with a good cover photo, short chapters, easy jazzy prose, an attractive font and pocket-size format. The stories are full of genuine South Africa: high school hazards, drugs, crooks, poverty, shattered families, uneasy or desperate friendships. But there’s another point. A reader quote states: “I like how the story depicts our reality; this is everything that we come across daily.” Old wrinklies like me *don’t* know about this kind of reality. So what is fun reading for teenagers is eye-opening for others.

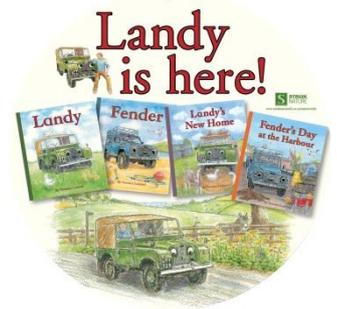
BIBLE STORIES for children retold by Wendy Maartens, illustrated by Marie Prinsloo (Struik Children 2015)

God and the Bible mean different things to different people. Wendy Maartens makes her own feelings quite clear: she believes in a God who knows every one of us by name and loves us unconditionally. So these 30 stories from the Old Testament and 20 New Testament are about God’s wonderful world and a God who loves, smiles and forgives. Each story has a double spread in clear type, framed by Marie Prinsloo’s cheering artwork with people dressed in bright colours and wearing watermelon smiles. Each story ends with a brief, grateful prayer. If that’s the sort of introduction to the Bible you want for your children, here it is.

Don’t look for historical authenticity. The Israelites didn’t live in neat square houses or dress in assorted colours. The census of Quirinius (Cyrenius) which led to new taxation did not take place until AD 6. The fishing boats on Galilee didn’t have stripes or little red flags.

John did not baptise people fully clothed. Such awkward facts as human sacrifice (Abraham and Isaac) and the charges brought against Jesus (Caiaphas is not mentioned, nor that Jesus was a Jew) are slid over.

This is unthreatening, unworrying and relentlessly happy storytelling. It even offers a helpful summary of the Revelation, which I have not encountered in a children's bible before.



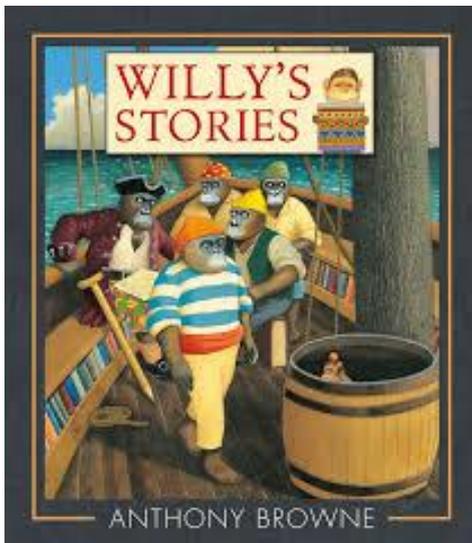
ANDY

FENDER

LANDY'S NEW HOME

FENDER'S DAY AT THE HARBOUR all written & illustrated by Veronica Lamond (Struik Nature 2015; originally published in UK)

Four hard-back picture books with the Land Rover as a 'live' character, much in the tradition of Val Biro's beloved vintage *Gumdrop*. Clearly-presented, soft-edged colour pictures with light humour and lots of cheerful animals and farming (or seaside) details. Just be aware that this is picture-postcard rural England as we wish it still was (if it ever was). Entertaining, palatable, fun – to read aloud or for early solo readers. Don't want to nag, but I do feel that in a modern children's book, drivers on the open road should be shown wearing a seat-belt. I love the official note: *Under license from Jaguar Land Rover. This book is not a representation of Jaguar Land Rover ... It's fiction and hurray for all four of them!*



WILLY'S STORIES by Anthony Browne (Walker Books)

Hurray! A new and glorious picture book featuring Willy (already famous in *Willy's Pictures* and *Willy the Dreamer* and more) this time taking a walk through ten classic stories such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Treasure Island*, *Alice in Wonderland*. As always, the artwork rewards observant eyes – with books everywhere! Each book-visit incorporates a moment in the original, ending with a question testing out how well the reader knows the story and provoking them into reading the story itself and finding out. The most scary picture in this set is definitely the Wild Wood (from *The Wind in the Willows*) but my favourite is Willy as Peter Pan having a swash-buckling fight with Captain Hook – with a bored cat taking notice at all! Here is a past winner of the Hans Christian Andersen illustrator award, tongue in cheek, paint-brush in hand, urging all children to explore further into the wondrous world of books. Visually inviting. Artistically rewarding.

More Than One Story. Bilda (from Sweden) has produced a bi-lingual pack of cards encouraging a 'game' of conversations. "Tell a story about a time when you felt lucky." "Tell about something you look forward to." ~ and so on. Even without the cards, storytelling in a group is to be encouraged. That's how the oral tradition started.

FAMILY WALKS IN CAPE TOWN by Tim Lundy (Struik Travel & Heritage 2016)

30 easy routes in the city and surrounds

No better way to describe – and indicate my approval of this book – than to quote from the Preface: "When my daughter reached the age of six and my father was 72, I realised that they had reached the same level of walking ability". So Tim Lundy has put together descriptions (with clear maps) of walks where you can "slow down and take the time to look around" at "diverse birdlife, seashells, trees, weirdly shaped rocks or just funky patterns in the sand." The walks (few over an hour in length) are place around the peninsula, including Hout Bay, Kommetjie, False Bay, as well as Milnerton and Durbanville. Lots of colour photos of families enjoying the route (including Tim's own) with detailed directions, "Things to do" and warnings where required. If you enjoy the outdoors, your family needs this book!

THE WHITE ROAD by Edmund de Waal (Chatto & Windus 2015)

Author of: *The Hare with Amber Eyes*

"A pilgrimage of sorts" in which the author/artist (a most skilled potter himself) goes searching, geographically and historically, for the great sources of porcelain. We travel with him in place and time to Jingdezhen in China, the Appalachians of South Carolina and the hills of old Cornwall (via such places as Venice, Dresden, Dublin – making the acquaintance of King Louis XIV and William Cookworthy en route). Lovely, soft writing and engaging storytelling. A book to be read slowly and absorbed with appreciation. There is even poetry in the porcelain from Dachau. That twists the mind more than a little.

"There's always a story. It's all stories, really. The sun coming up every day is a story. Everything's got a story in it. Change the story, change the world."

Terry Pratchett in *A Hat Full of Sky*



I cannot omit Zapiro's emotive comment

☺ There is no charge for this newsletter.

The next issue will be sent out in mid-June 2016.

New subscribers are most welcome.

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