

the child who has progressed beyond ten. It all revolves around a birthday party, and the procession of animals arriving to join in the fun; and their legs. The reader is asked to keep a running total as first the polar bear, then the duck, then the hippo arrive; but it becomes more complicated as each double spread fills up, with animals arriving in pairs from the left while others fly in from the right, and some creatures have no legs at all. There is food everywhere, dancing has broken out, and still they are arriving. The penultimate spread shows the counting of legs as an enormous sum on a blackboard, with the birthday boy quite bamboozled by the problem. For those who've given up and are just enjoying the story, the answer is on the last page. Each spread is a riot of colour and movement, with small details to be discovered on each re-reading. Children will revel in the anarchy created by the animal guests; this is a joyful story of fun and friendship, with an absorbing built-in mathematical challenge.

Marianne Bradnock

Green, Ruth

Stanley's Plan

Tate, 2015, pp32, £9.99
978 1 84976 305 9

Stanley the dog is always hungry, so when he spots a tasty looking pie high on a shelf, he starts planning ways to reach it. Told in rhyme, Stanley's plans never quite get off the ground. His friends seem willing to help, but each in turn gently dissuades him from each course of action until, finally, he goes to bed, exhausted. Sharp-eyed readers will have spotted the clue on the back cover, and another lying on the table in front of Brian, the cat. Without giving too much away, I can reassure you that Stanley isn't disappointed for long!



This is a lovely book in every way. It feels beautiful, with good thick paper and a soft matt cover that is very satisfying to hold. The illustrations have a retro air, and the colours and shapes are reassuringly homely. Stanley himself is adorable, with expressive ears and a permanent smile. All of his companions share Stanley's friendly cartoony feel, making this a cosy book for sharing.

Helen Thompson

Griffiths, Neil and Loudon, Janette

The Jolly Dodgers! Pirates Who Pretended

Red Robin Books, 2014, pp32, £6.99
978 1 908702 12 8

The pirates in this story are not your usual scary, fierce rogues you would expect. Instead they are a group of men who are pretending to be pirates

because their wives insist they are. However, when a couple of wives sneak on board they discover their husbands are enjoying a holiday rather than stealing and looting. When the wives discover this they become the pirates instead.

The beginning of the book has some fantastic pirate names and language that children will really enjoy. The end paper has definitions of key pirate words. This book would make a good addition to a collection of books for a pirate topic.

Kate Keaveny

Grossnickle, Mary and Relyea-Parr, Alison

A Place in my Heart

Jessica Kingsley, 2014, pp36, £9.99
978 1 84905 771 4

A Place in My Heart is a book about a chipmunk named Charlie who has been adopted by a family of squirrels. Charlie knows why he doesn't look like the rest of his family, but likes to hear his mother tell him the story of his birthmother and birthfather. He soon begins to wonder about what his birthparents might be like, which stirs a wealth of emotions inside him. His mother assures Charlie that his heart is big enough for both sets of parents.

A Place in My Heart is neither over nor understated in its dealings with adoption. The soft illustrations are well incorporated into the text and greatly enhance the narrative. The story enforces the notion that our identity is made of many pieces that come from different places. Most importantly, it encourages children to ask questions. Oftentimes our attempts to deal with emotions ourselves can lead to misinterpretations. Asking questions leads to understanding. It teaches us that honesty is the best policy, as long as that honesty stems from a place of love. When Charlie is afraid of hurting his mother's feelings for thinking about his birthmother, he is comforted by the fact that there are no limits to who we keep in our hearts.

It is evident that Mary Grossnickle is writing from experience. This is a comforting guide for parents and children alike who are dealing with adoption.

Sasha Jawed

Gunaratnam, Tracy and Costa, Marta

Preposterous Rhinoceros

Maverick Arts, 2015, pp32, £6.99
978 1 84886 165 7

Oh dear! King Lion has a sore throat and can't read the bedtime story. All the animals are distressed about the lack of a story but an offer from Rhinoceros to read instead of Lion makes them all laugh at him. 'That's PREPOSTEROUS, Rhinoceros!' the crowd cried. 'You don't know anything about books.' Determined to prove them wrong, Rhinoceros sets about finding a story by

copying what he has watched Lion do so often – open the pages and stare. Surely, if you open a book a story comes out? He tries to wind the books up with a key, to shake the words out and seeks advice from others. Eventually, Shy Salamander agrees to teach him to read.

As soon as I saw the flying books on the endpapers, I suspected this might be my sort of story. I was right. It is a lovely tale, amusingly illustrated, which will be perfect to read aloud to any infant class. Funny animals getting things wrong: what more could we ask? First and foremost books should be about enjoyment but having engaged with this text, there are actually many opportunities to talk about the English language not least about how playing with letters evolves into making meaning from print. The 'slippery' nature of English is also fun to consider when Rhinoceros takes literally all suggestions about getting the story out of the book: 'Dive straight in.' says Drama Llama – he dives headfirst into the book and bangs his head; 'Get stuck in.' says Techie Toucan (too absorbed in his laptop to look up) – he covers himself in honey; 'Books need to be read.' says Shy Salamander – he gets red paint. Children encounter these idioms every day – they are often told to make a 'line by the door' – so it would be fun to see how many they can come up with.

This is a thoroughly enjoyable book which will work well in classrooms from YrR to Yr2. It concludes with

Rhinoceros becoming a role model for every child as he takes great pride in reading to all his friends, including a fully recovered King Lion.

Prue Goodwin



Hall, Algy Craig and Pye, Ali

The Deep Dark Wood

Orchard, 2015, pp32, £6.99
978 1 40832 515 5

First we are introduced to the deep dark wood, of witches, trolls, giants... and the big bad wolf. Then a sweet little girl trots into the frame.... 'Doesn't she know it's dangerous here?' So far, so satisfyingly scary for the young reader. The story continues, and those young readers familiar with Red Riding Hood will recognise the danger for sweet little girl as she sets off under the protection of sly Mr Wolf.

On the way we meet three monsters, a witch, smelly old troll and hungry giant. Mr Wolf deliciously bristles and grizzles, as he scares away the witch, bristles and grizzles and claws and gnaws as he scares that troll away and finally bristles and grizzles and claws and gnaws and howls and growls as, increasingly frightened himself, Mr Wolf manages to scare away the enormous hungry giant.