children’s books ireland reading list

CELEBRATING DIFFERENCE

AGE RANGE 0–YA

#EveryChildaReader
BEN CLANTON  
**BOO WHO?**  
Maybe if I were a dinosaur, I’d be better at football. Maybe if I were a robot, I’d be better at maths. These are the kinds of things one might wrestle with on a daily basis, but in Ben Clanton’s colourful and playful new picturebook we learn that, although being different can be tough, it’s our differences that make playing together with new friends so much more fun. The simple, bold images contribute to the sense of emotion, helping children understand how the characters might be feeling. (Age 2–4)

TOM McLAUGHLIN  
**ALONG CAME A DIFFERENT**  
The Reds love being red, what with all the cool red hats, the red apples and the singing of red songs. But then along come the Yellows and if that wasn’t bad enough, here come the Blues … The different colour tribes are suspicious of each other’s differences and draw up borders and rules. An uneasy peace reigns, until a really different different arrives. This picturebook deals in a simple way with complex issues like racism, exclusion, bullying and cultural appropriation. (Age 2–4, 5–8)

MARIE-LOUISE FITZPATRICK  
**OWL BAT BAT OWL**  
An owl family settles on their perch for the night only to be joined by a family of bats underneath, and it looks like the two groups aren’t going to get along – all except the littlest ones, who seem interested and excited about the presence of strangers. This wordless picturebook effortlessly deals with issues of intolerance, difference and friendship using this inspired premise, with plenty of space for parent–child interaction and interpretation. Beautifully illustrated and cleverly put together, this book is a little treasure. (Age 2–4, 5–8)

MARIE-LOUISE FITZPATRICK  
**THE NEW KID**  
This imaginative book deals with the scary business of making new friends. It doesn’t matter if you are the new kid on the block or part of the local gang, it’s always tricky territory. At first Ellie seems strange and different and the others are wary but she can make up brilliant games and she’s fun to be around. Fitzpatrick’s beautiful illustrations and rich tonal palette add further nuances to the central themes, culminating in scenes of great energy, life and movement as new friendships are successfully negotiated. (Age 2–4, 5–8)
EMILY GRAVETT
CYRIL AND PAT
Cyril is the only squirrel in Lake Park. Sad and lonely, he is overjoyed to meet Pat and, although the pair quickly become best friends, the other park animals deeply disapprove of the friendship, claiming that Pat is just too different. The scorned Pat flees into the city but Cyril soon discovers just how much he needs his pal. With rhyming text and buoyant illustrations, this warm and amusing romp shows how friendship transcends difference. (Age 2–4, 5–8)

JOHN AGARD illustrated by JESSICA COURTNEY-TICKLE
COME ALL YOU LITTLE PERSONS
This is a timely book, exploring solidarity, togetherness and acceptance, with the ultimate message that we are all equal on our beautiful planet. Agard brings his Caribbean rhythm and energy to the verse, which reads more like a song than a traditional poem. Brimming with warmth, the illustrations root the text in raw, magical and varied landscapes. *Come All You Little Persons* reflects diverse people and landscapes, allowing all children to find themselves and their lives in this empowering book. (Age 2–5)

DR EMMA WADDINGTON and DR CHRISTOPHER MCCURRY illustrated by LOUIS THOMAS
WHY ARE PEOPLE DIFFERENT COLOURS?
Children are so good at asking questions, and when these are around big issues such as people and their differences the answers are really important. Written by two experienced psychologists, the book is designed to advise parents how best to approach questions like ‘Why has grandma wrinkles?’ or ‘Why does my teacher wear a headscarf?’ A safe springboard to talk about the big questions and foster empathy and understanding in your little person. (Non-fiction, Age 4+)

DAVID MACKINTOSH
MARSHALL ARMSTRONG IS NEW TO OUR SCHOOL
Marshall Armstrong isn’t just new to school. He is a novelty: everything about him is different and, although the narrator never says it, potentially less cool. But it’s precisely this strangeness that will win over his sceptical schoolmates in a whirlwind of a birthday party, bringing the kids (and the reader) from wariness to acceptance until the brilliant finish. David Mackintosh’s illustrations are great fun: they’re dynamic and quirky, and full of intriguing detail. (Age 5–8)
SARAH McINTYRE
THE NEW NEIGHBOURS

A house full of animals is disrupted when they hear a rumour that rats are moving into the basement. As this news spreads around the house, the characters collectively experience a range of emotions – apprehension, excitement, curiosity, anxiety, fear and, finally, reassurance – when at last they meet the new arrivals. The busy, colourful illustrations are full of activity, with plenty to notice on each page, adding to the increasing sense of chaos. (Age 5–8)

PHIL EARLE illustrated by SARA OGILVIE
THE WAR NEXT DOOR

Another hilarious tale in the series about the inhabitants of Storey Street, this time focusing on the Milners, headed by horrible estate agent Mr Milner, whose mini-me, Masher, is the most feared bully in school – unchallenged by all until he meets his match in the fearless and wonderful Jemima Jessop. The hilarity and rapid pace are balanced by the very real issues of dealing with emotions, bullying and conforming to expectations. A fun and heart-warming read, peppered with wit. (Age 9–11)

CHARLI HOWARD
SPLASH
NOSY CROW 2018 (PBK) 208PP £6.99 ISBN 9781788001700

This acutely observed novel astutely captures the complexity of pre-teen relationships and the struggle with self-image. Twelve-year-old Molly must reach a series of accommodations at home, in her social life and at school. Her entirely credible two-steps-forward, one-step-back struggle is deftly caught in this page turner by body-positivity ambassador Charli Howard. It’s a potential lifesaver for pre-teen girls, or any of us agonising over who we might become or how we might present. (Age 9–11)

R. J. PALACIO
WONDER
CORGI 2012 (PBK) 316PP £6.99 ISBN 9780552565974

August was born with an extremely severe facial abnormality. He is acutely aware of the revulsion in people’s reactions when they first see him. The story traces this ten-year-old’s first year at school, as previously he had only home schooling. Multiple narrators give different perspectives as he struggles to be accepted as ‘normal’. A poignant, heart-warming and ultimately uplifting tale that will appeal to both children and adults. (Age 9–11)
SIOBHAN DOWD illustrated by EMMA SHOARD

THE PAVEE AND THE BUFFER GIRL


A sensitive portrayal of Traveller life, this graphic novel is beautifully written and illustrated. Bullying the outsider is nothing new, but the story is given a unique twist through the words of Traveller boy Jim Curran as he struggles with schooling and life in general in the fictional Irish town of Dundray. Everything is made sweeter by settled girl Kit – the buffer girl of the title – and their innocent romance in the sea cave beneath the town lends a magical quality to this powerful book. (Age 12–14)

KELLY McCUAUGHRAIN

FLYING TIPS FOR FLIGHTLESS BIRDS


This is a multi-layered tale, both funny and moving, set against the backdrop of a struggling circus school run by Birdie and Finch Franconi’s family. The big issues of acceptance, friendship and family are all explored with clarity, humour and a whole lot of heart beneath Franconi’s exhilarating Big Top. Fans of contemporary fiction with a focus on family and friendship (with a dash of romance) will love this story about being yourself and learning to let people into your life. (Age 12–14)

BIRDIE MILANO

BOY MEETS HAMSTER


This hilarious début examines a teenage boy’s holiday with his family at a caravan park. Dylan’s relationship with his best friend Kayla, who has come with him, is under pressure as both teens face identity issues and face up to bullying. Kayla has a birthmark on her face and is overweight; Dylan is gay but hasn’t come out to his parents. Relationships and identities, bullying and inner strength are core themes evaluated in this charming novel, albeit with a light-hearted touch. (Age 12–14)

CLÉMENTINE BEAUVAIS

PIGLETTES

PUSHKIN PRESS 2017 (PBK) 286PP £7.99 ISBN 9781782691204

This may just be the first positive book about the transformative power of cyber-bullying. Mireille, Astrid and Hakima have been voted the ugliest girls in their school in a nasty on-line competition that the teachers can do nothing to stop. It hurts. It isolates. It humiliates. But in a bold turning of the tables, it also empowers them to take action and transform their lives. Friendship, forgiveness, tolerance and love are celebrated here and victims become heroes by taking back control and refuting the definitions that others put on them. (Age 12–14, YA)
SARAH CROSSAN
THE WEIGHT OF WATER
BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN’S BOOKS 2012 (PBK) 240PP £6.99 ISBN 9781408830239
This tale of twelve-year-old Kasienka and her journey from Poland to London, from isolation to finding a place within her new world, is carefully and elegantly written by Sarah Crossan. The form of the text is stream-of-consciousness poetry, with each poem acting as a separate chapter in the story of Kasienka – her disrupted home, her school, her friends and enemies. The verses reflect the worries and emotions often experienced by many young immigrants as well as the bordering adolescent. (Age 12–14, YA)

KIM SLATER
A SEVEN-LETTER WORD
MACMILLAN CHILDREN’S BOOKS 2016 (PBK) 304PP £6.99 ISBN 9781509801138
Scrabble is cleverly woven into both the form and content of this novel about a teenager’s search for the mother who abandoned him. Finlay’s stutter renders him unable to speak and open to bullying, but he uses his Scrabble prowess as an alternative means of expression. Initially, this may seem a predictable tale about overcoming adversity, but it develops into an intriguing mystery as Finlay investigates his mother’s disappearance. (Age 12–14, YA)

SUSIN NIELSEN
WE ARE ALL MADE OF MOLECULES
Like it or not, Stewart and Ashley have just become siblings, as part of a newly formed blended family. This excellent book deals with tough subjects such as bullying, homophobia, bereavement and pressure to have underage sex, interspersed with plenty of laugh-out-loud moments. Stewart’s rational, problem-solving way of looking at the world is contrasted with Ashley’s often superficial views and the alternating narrators kept the momentum all through the book. You’ll be completely hooked from page one! (YA)

BALI RAI
THE HARDER THEY FALL
This funny and thought-provoking book focuses on friendship and family. It also looks at the all too common problems of poverty and bullying through the eyes of the geeky and highly likeable protagonist Cal, who volunteers at his local food bank, where Jacob, a troubled new student at Cal’s school, gets help. Both Cal and Jacob are targets of school bullies, but perhaps their unlikely friendship can help them through. An enjoyable and easy read with a strong storyline and great characterisation. (YA)
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