

All Kinds of Animal Families

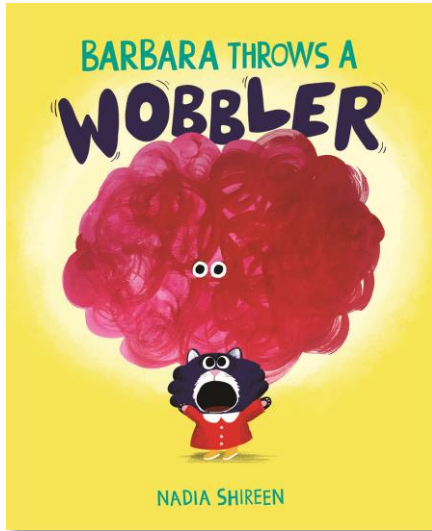
by Sophy Henn

Kirkus Reviews, STARRED (Review Issue Date: February 1, 2021 Online Publish Date: January 13, 2021)

There are different kinds of animal families, too?

The text is embraced by rainbow-stripe endpapers and a clear message that even though no two families, human or animal, “are quite the same,” nevertheless “they all have one thing that’s the same...love.” Within, each double-page spread highlights a different animal family with two levels of text; one is a general comment (“Here is a family where Mommy looks after the babies”), and the second offers more parenting facts (“Orangutan mommies look after their young longer than any other animal parent, and they do it on their own. They love their babies, very, very much”). Backmatter notes keyed to thumbnail pictures add additional, general information about each animal in the text. Animals as familiar as the clownfish, elephant, and cheetah are included, as are lesser-known animals such as the albatross, long-tailed tit, and emu. In scenes from diverse ecosystems—the Australian Outback, the oceans, North American woodland, and African savanna and desert—mothers, fathers, mother-and-father pairs, large extended families and communities, grandparents, two mothers, and two fathers raise and protect their young offspring. Spread after spread of boldly colored illustrations of a lush rainforest, a glowing coral reef, golden grasslands, and an icy evergreen branch, among others, make this a storytime winner for all seasons.

Lovingly reinforces the idea that diverse families are a natural part of our large and diverse world.



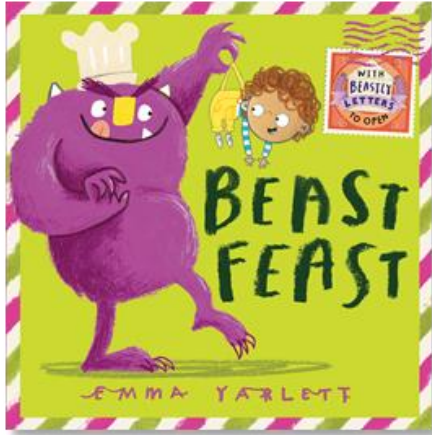
Barbara Throws a Wobbler

by Nadia Shireen

Kirkus Reviews, STARRED (Review Issue Date: May1, 2021 Online Publish Date: April 14, 2021)
Can a scream become a creature in its own right?

Barbara's a cat who stands upright in yellow boots and a red dress. Today she has a deep frown and a very bad mood. "It had started in the morning because of a sock problem. And at lunchtime there had been a strange pea." The sock problem: one sock halfway onto one hind paw, another on her tail, one each held by a front paw—all different colors. The strange pea is olive colored and off-puttingly larger than her regular green peas. Ice cream falling from her cone onto the ground is the last straw, and "Barbara thr[ows] a GREAT BIG... / WOBBLER!" Few United States readers will know this British slang for tantrum—which Shireen paints like a close-up single scream—and the unfamiliar word brings extra gloriousness to the Wobbler's manifestation as a great, red, googly-eyed creature, "gloopy and heavy, like an angry jelly." For a while, the Wobbler keeps Barbara unhappy, forbidding offers of sympathetic chats, cuddles, and replacement ice cream from pals Otto, Martha, and Small Bob. But then—"Stinky bumhead!" Barbara and the Wobbler call each other, transitioning into giggles before the Wobbler disappears with a pop. The art is brightly colored and, though at first appearing simple, brings a clever, complex depth of emotion and expression, from fury and powerlessness to humor, gentleness, and relief. A picture glossary of bad moods closes the book with humor and empathy.

Funny, respectful, and cathartic—exhilarating.



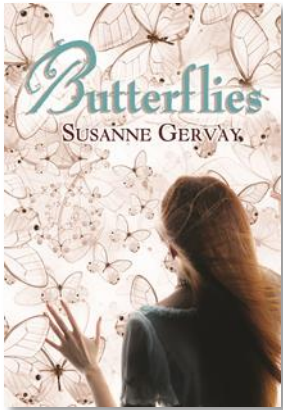
Beast Feast

by Emma Yarlett

School Library Journal, STARRED (online March 1, 2020)

K-Gr 4—Beast catches a small child and thinks the child looks very tasty; he even names the child “Dinner.” Beast invites his beastly friends to a feast where Dinner is to be served as the main course. Beast sends out and receives letters from his friends with their preferences on how Dinner should be served. One unique feature of this book is the addition of letters that readers can open themselves. Some letters pop off the page and further encourage reader interaction. Another fun feature is the eerie recipes included in the front and back of the book. The relationship between the human and beast is developed seamlessly through the narrative and imagery, and there is a considerable amount of conflict and suspense as the story unwinds. The illustrations add fun supporting details to the text, and the typeface of the narrative further adds to the spooky feel.

VERDICT A comical read with many delightfully creepy mentions, this tale captures the wonder of developing unique friendships.



Butterflies

By Susanne Gervay

School Library Journal, STARRED (November 1, 2011)

High school is hard enough for teens who look normal, but for Katherine, who fell into a fire when she was three years old and endured 37 surgeries to repair the damage, it's even worse. She is getting ready to graduate and seeking independence, but she is self-conscious about her appearance. She is sensitive to the fact that Mum, who tells her she is beautiful, tries to give her confidence and works hard to make a living for her and her sister as their father left shortly after the accident. Katherine holds back tears when a classmate makes a rude remark, and a boy whom she dates a couple of times withdraws. Even though she is needy at times, her best friend is always supportive. Katherine is a swimmer, but when the coach recommends that she compete in the Paralympic Games, she realizes that others see her as handicapped instead of scarred, and she pushes for more surgery. Whenever readers think that Katherine is moving forward and accepting herself, she has a setback; she refers to herself the Beast. Readers will wait for the Beast to retreat for good and cheer when it finally does. This hopeful, heartfelt novel will give teens an understanding of what it means to have a reason to be self-conscious. Librarians won't be able to keep it on the shelf.



Dogs in Space

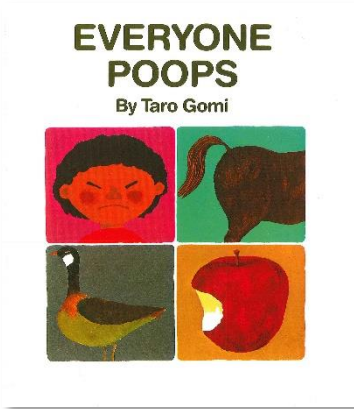
by Vix Southgate, illustrated by Iris Deppe

***School Library Journal*, STARRED POP** (Winter 2018)

This volume chronicles the tale of two dogs, Belka and Strelka, who were sent into space by the Soviet Union. The simple, colorful illustrations complement the text and show how the dogs were trained to stay calm and how they were fitted into their canine spacesuits. Launched into space on August 19, 1960, the animals successfully orbited the earth and returned safely. The artwork depicts smiling canines. Following their space adventure, the dogs lived healthy, happy lives – Strelka even gave birth to six puppies. Once stray dogs, wandering the streets of Moscow, they became heroes around the world and paved the way for the first man to go into space. The volume concludes with a brief synopsis of other animals that traveled into space, including a French cat, and an overview of space journeys, beginning with Belka and Strelka's adventure to the International Space Station and ending with a possible upcoming trip to Mars. VERDICT A must-have for libraries and a welcome addition for all STEM collections

***The Horn Book Magazine*, STARRED** (March/April 2019)

With a happier ending than that enjoyed by their legendary predecessor Laika, dogs Belka and Strelka became, in 1960, among the first animals to return, alive, from orbital flight. That does not, however, deny the suspense with which Southgate and Deppe tell and show their story. The book opens in a dark Moscow alley where a man is luring stray dogs with food, and even the type placement gets in on the drama. But turn the page and not to worry: "Oleg" is a scientist recruiting canine cadets for the Soviet Union's space program. Belka and Strelka pass all the tests and endure all the training (try getting your dog to stand at attention on a vibrating mat) to succeed at their mission: to blast off, orbit Earth several times, and come back down unharmed. The story is told with much enthusiasm and little anthropomorphism, with the automatically appealing narrative bolstered by useful scientific facts—Strelka's later maternity isn't just a feel-good anecdote, as "Strelka's puppies prove spaceflight is not harmful." With a zip equal to the story, the pictures use well-outlined, simple forms in depicting the dogs, placing them, as the occasion demands, in easy-to-follow panels, or playfully tipping their orientation for the double-page-spread illustration of the launch. The back matter includes a timeline of space flight from Belka and Strelka to the International Space Station.

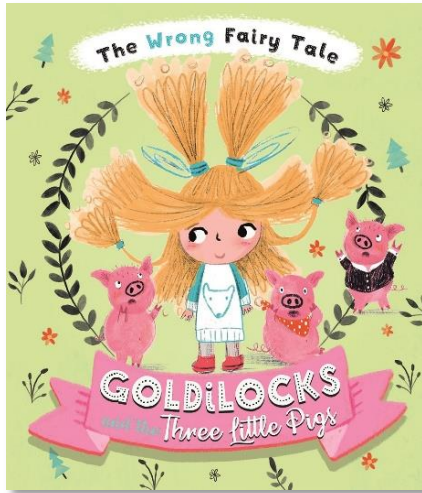


Everyone Poops

By Taro Gomi

The Horn Book Guide, STARRED (1993)

There's no mincing of words here. As the straightforward text explains, 'Fish poop / And so do birds / . . . Grown-ups poop / Children poop too.' Unabashed illustrations show beasts and bugs doing it, a male figure on the toilet, and a baby with a soiled diaper. Some adults may be squeamish about the facts of life so honestly confronted, but younger children will find their curiosity satisfied, and those in the throes of toilet training will appreciate the book's directness.



The Wrong Fairy Tale
Goldilocks and the Three Bears

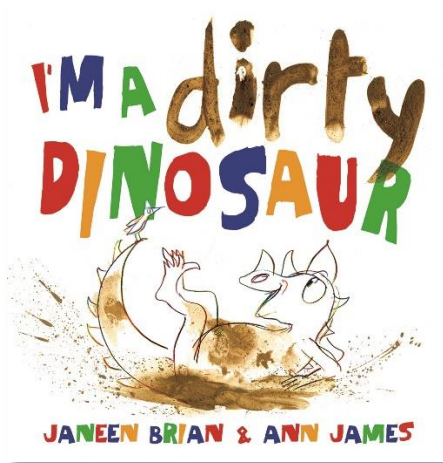
by Tracey Turner, illustrated by Summer Macon

Kirkus Reviews, STARRED (Review Issue Date: January 15, 2021 Online Publish Date: December 25, 2020)

In a mashup of two iconic fairy tales, Goldilocks finds herself in the middle of the Three Little Pigs' battle with the Big Bad Wolf.

When Goldilocks spots an unfamiliar brick house in the woods, she must satisfy her curiosity and barge right in. The three pigs living there are hiding in a closet, frightened by the probable reappearance of their archenemy, the Big Bad Wolf. Goldilocks, brazen as always, heads straight for the porridge, trying each one and enjoying the one that is just right. At that point all three pigs realize Goldilocks has involved herself in the wrong fairy tale, and they tell her so. But here comes the wolf, who, failing to blow down the brick house, tries to come down the chimney. Goldilocks and the pigs work together to build a fire that will get rid of him once and for all. (He is singed and scared but otherwise unharmed.) Thus the wrong fairy tale still leads to a happy ending, with Goldilocks and the pigs best friends forever. Little readers who know both tales will find great joy in pointing out the anomalies while newcomers to the fairy-tale world will love the silly adventures. Turner has created a fun-filled romp greatly aided by Macon's very brightly hued cartoons depicting a wild-haired, big-eyed Goldilocks (who presents White) and pink pigs whose every emotion is seen in exaggerated facial expressions and body language. Pair it with Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's fractured fairy tales or Turner and Macon's own Jack and the Three Bears (publishing simultaneously); either way the fun increases.

Lots of giggles in this delightfully goofy tale.



I'm a Dirty Dinosaur

Written by Janeen Brian

Illustrated by Ann James

Kirkus Reviews, STARRED (August 1, 2014)

This Australian import cries out for toddler participation, with parts for everyone. The little dinosaur—an outline sketch of a creature drawn with multicolored pencil—rejoices in total mudlusciousness with a vigorous chant. "I'm a dirty dinosaur / with a dirty face. // I never have a wash / I just shake about the place." The winsome background to the dinosaur's antics is painted with watercolor and smeared and splattered with actual mud. Opposite, in bold print with each letter a different color, is the refrain: "SHAKE, SHAKE, / SHAKE, SHAKE, / SHAKE ABOUT / THE PLACE!" The dinosaur goes on to mention a "dirty tum," which it taps like a drum: "TAP, TAP," etc. There is also stamping about the street with dirty feet and sliding that dirty tail "like a snail." At the end, in deep realization of its yuckiness, the dinosaur decides to go to the swamp and "GIVE MYSELF A WASH!" Birds, flowers, dragonflies and a frog or two accompany the protagonist, who walks (dances, really) on two legs and sports little stegosauruslike spine plates and a belly button. It is nearly impossible to look at without reading aloud, chanting aloud and even tapping and stamping and sliding: extreme joyousness. (Picture book. 4-7)



Leo and the Octopus

Written by Isabelle Marinov

Illustrated by Chris Nixon

Kirkus Reviews, STARRED (Review Issue Date: July 1, 2021 Online Publish Date: June 16th, 2021)
A captive octopus helps a neurodivergent boy find companionship.

Leo feels like he's "living on the wrong planet." Sensory overload makes him retreat into a box to read—but this is a lonely pleasure. When he meets Maya, the octopus, at the aquarium, he sees her as a kindred spirit. At the library, he learns about octopuses, and when he returns to the aquarium, the keeper allows him to touch her. He realizes she shows emotion by changing color. "If only humans were as easy to understand." During weekly visits he strengthens their friendship, building increasingly difficult puzzles for her to solve and helping to erect a "no flash" sign when too many picture-taking visitors stress her out. Eventually, through sharing his own knowledge about octopuses with another small boy, he makes a new, human friend. Writer Marinov, mother of an autistic child, expertly paces this gentle story, interspersing Leo's own feelings with information about octopuses. The author of a book about Asperger's syndrome adds a note in the backmatter. Nixon's slightly stylized art uses a limited palette and an ever changing layout to extend readers' understanding. When Maya reacts to too many flashing cameras, angry red pages help readers feel her stress. Leo and the keeper are depicted with light-tan skin tones; his new friend is much darker, with black, curly hair.

Sympathetic and gently insightful.



Lifesize

by Sophy Henn

Booklist, STARRED (Online November 28, 2018 Print Issue December 1, 2018)

As foretold by the title, this oversize, interactive picture book features lifesize illustrations of various animals—or at least the parts that fit on the pages. Young readers are invited to get their toes out and compare toenails with an African elephant, spread their fingers and try to high five a polar bear, or hang a sideways double-page spread underneath their nose to get the effect of a full-on Bengal tiger roar. Not all of the creatures are supersize; smaller specimens include a desert scorpion, Cuban parakeet, and tiny bee hummingbird. Intervening pages offer brief tidbits about behaviors and habitats, and a steady stream of content-based questions reinforce material: Whose tongue is the longest? What other animals live here? (Some of those other animals can be seen in the background). Full-color illustrations cover every page, and the adorable full-size panda face on the cover is hard to resist. The final pages pull all the examples into a comparison chart, and ask readers to estimate where they would fit. This is a great choice for a more STEM-focused storytime, and here's a helpful hint: make sure there's a mirror on hand so that kids can see how they compare for themselves. — *Kathleen McBroom*

Publishers Weekly, STARRED (September 18, 2019)

Cleverly designed around the question “How big?” Henn's oversize book illustrates animals and their parts in real-life size. Clean, bright colors capture everything from an elephant's toenail to the diminutive bee hummingbird; readers can stare into the startling eye of a giant squid, high-five a polar bear, and gape at a tiger's (terrifyingly large) maw. Life-size illustrations are marked and interspersed with spreads showing the creature in its habitat with other flora and fauna. Simple text encourages participation with the images—“ROOOAAAARRR like a Bengal tiger!”—and offers basic facts: “Giraffes... are the world's TALLEST animal so it makes sense that they have an extraordinarily long tongue.” An ingenious visual scale shows the relative sizes of the animals measured against the volume—12 inches square—a neat trick for young readers fuzzy on feet and inches. A read-over-and-over-again delight. Ages 3–up.



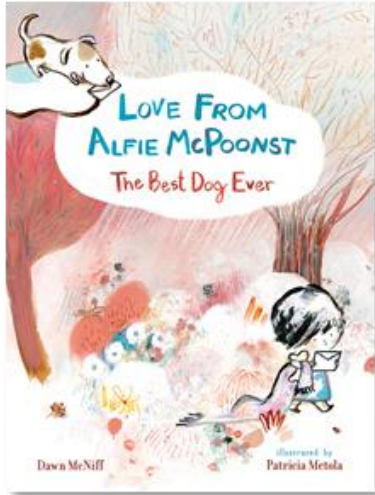
Lights-Out, Leonard

by Josh Pyke, illustrated by Chris Nixon

***School Library Journal*, STARRED** (September 1, 2020)

This funny, twisted bedtime story features Leonard, a white child, who sees monsters in the dark shadows of his room. He insists he needs the lights left on. His parents acquiesce and allow it; then one day a book turns up at Leonard's house that is all about how to get rid of monsters in the bedroom. The first tip is to brush your teeth, because "minty breath makes monsters so sick they shrivel up and disintegrate into dust." This book employs the genius idea of reframing bedtime rituals as monster-fighting strategies. The illustrations appear to be mixed-media collage and have a muted palette. The strong graphic elements provide a lot of energy around the monsters and offer younger readers an opportunity to point out things in the pictures. Teachers could easily use this story as a mentor text for writing descriptions, either specific prompts modeled after the monsters' descriptions, or explanations of bedtime rituals and how they keep the monsters at bay. Pyke writes with vocabulary that is excellent for building oral language. Kids and parents are going to love this idea, as it will surely help with some of the bedtime tasks that kids push back against.

VERDICT Don't miss this terrific bedtime story—it's a must for all elementary and preschool collections.

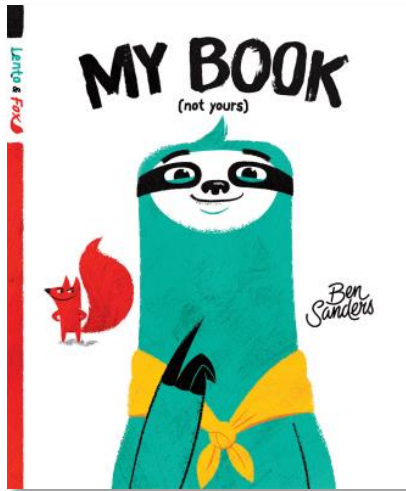


Love from Alfie McPoonst

by Dawn McNiff, illustrated by Patricia Metola

Kirkus Reviews, STARRED (Review Issue Date: January 1, 2020 Online Publish Date: December 8, 2019)

In this British import, a dog writes letters from heaven to a child back on Earth, easing the grieving process. Alfie McPoonst, a dog of indeterminate breed, has recently moved on to being a "Sky Dog" in Dog Heaven, residing on the "nicest cloud" in the sky. He writes to Izzy, his owner, a diminutive, round-headed moppet. Izzy is bereft, carrying Alfie's blanket and bone toy everywhere. In subsequent letters, Alfie describes how much fun he has in Dog Heaven, playing with other dogs, chasing "postmen," and scaring wolves. He is allowed to engage in formerly forbidden activities such as eating cow pies and rolling in flower beds. He writes, "I watch you through a star peephole every day" and that he left a ball of dog fluff behind the sofa. That revelation inspires a touching letter from Izzy to Alfie, telling him, "I keep [my fluff] in a special heart locket, so I'll never forget you, even when I'm 100." Impressionistic illustrations in a limited, mostly rusty-brown palette show Alfie enjoying his new environment and Izzy's parents cuddling and comforting their child. Illustrations on the endpapers show the family, who present white, visiting Alfie's grave in the garden behind their house. While Izzy is obviously just a tiny tot, both the understated story and imaginative illustrations allow readers to accept the child's ability to understand Alfie's letters and to write back. A memorable effort that will comfort anyone who has lost a beloved dog.



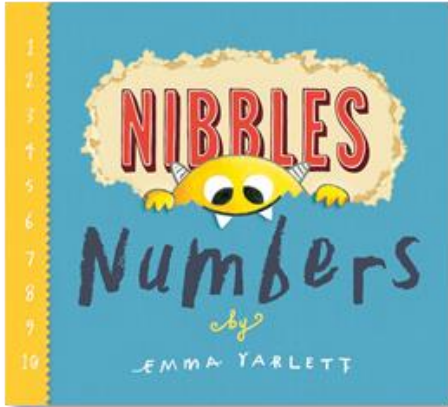
My Book (Not Yours)

by Ben Sanders

Kirkus Reviews, STARRED (Review Issue Date: July 15, 2020 Online Publish Date: June 30, 2020)

A sloth and an interfering fox vie for control of the book.

Lento, a sloth, strides across the opening page, announcing, “This is MY BOOK,” but before there’s time to tell the story, a “little nap” intervenes. Seizing the moment, Fox boldly swings across the gutter on a rope, challenging the inert Lento for the book’s ownership, yelling, “You snooze, you lose, sloth,” initiating instant rivalry. Ignoring Lento’s claim that Fox and his takeover are not part of the script, Fox insists the book needs a more dynamic lead character. Protesting vehemently, Lento proceeds to compete with Fox to prove who’s the best lead. Lento yodels. Fox blasts out of a canon. Fox soars in a hot air balloon only to be felled by Lento in a plane. Warning Fox in an O.K Corral–style showdown that “this book ain’t big enough for the both of us,” Lento devises a plan to get Fox out of the book—maybe. Presented in bold, individualized type in the dialogue-only text, Lento and Fox’s contest to control the book becomes the story. Their hilarious, attention-getting, action-filled antics play out in simple, eye-catching red, green, yellow, black, and white shapes and backgrounds. Slow Lento’s distressed, anguished, and determined expressions and body language prove the perfect foil for nimble Fox’s mercurial demeanor, outrageous behavior, and arrogant bravado.



Nibbles: Numbers

by Emma Yarlett

***School Library Journal*, STARRED** (January 2, 2019)

A naughty book-eating monster named Nibbles chomps his way through the pages of the book, creating monster-size die-cut munches as he counts from one to 10. The lovable Nibbles is a tiny yellow scamp with horns, big eyes, and four formidable teeth. Yet aside from his monstrous behavior, he's more endearing than threatening. This is a clever and fun, interactive counting book; little ones will gobble it up and ask for more.



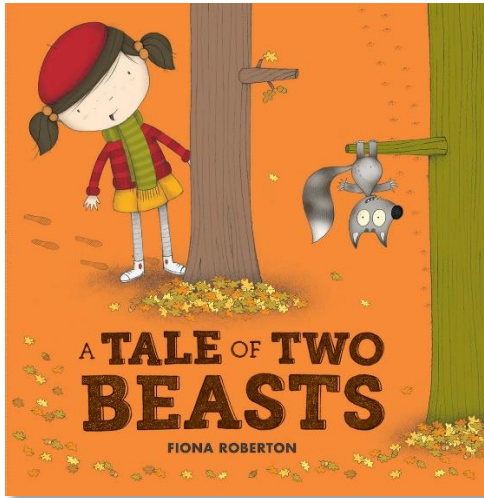
The Perfect Shelter

by Clare Helen Welsh, illustrated by Åsa Gilland

Kirkus Reviews, STARRED (Review Issue Date: August 1, 2020 Online Publish Date: July 14, 2020)

A young child in an interracial family copes with an older sister's illness and hospital stay. Two children lie happily in the woods with their parents, among grass, trees, and flowers in hues of yellow, white, red, and blue. "At first nobody knew. It was the perfect day, it was the perfect weather... // ...to build a shelter in the woods." The children sing as they work and build "the perfect, perfect shelter!" But soon things change. Big sister is tired. The weather reflects the family's changes. Despite a "wild wind," the children build again. Then, amid a "river of rain," the mother helps the narrating protagonist mend the shelter as the big sister is with the doctors. Big sister has an operation; the narrator worries and doesn't understand. A thunderstorm strikes. The perfect shelter is gone. Over time, through snowy days and nights, big sister, still in the hospital, grows stronger. One day, she suggests building a shelter right there in her hospital bed. The story captures the turmoil, uncertainty, sadness, and anxiety of watching a loved one go through illness and wanting things to go back to normal, and it ends with a celebration of finding a new normal. Gilland's illustrations use gorgeous layered colors, patterns, and clean lines with plenty of white space for thoroughly engaging pictures. The father has brown skin, the mother presents as White, and the children are shades of light brown.

Lovely and healing.

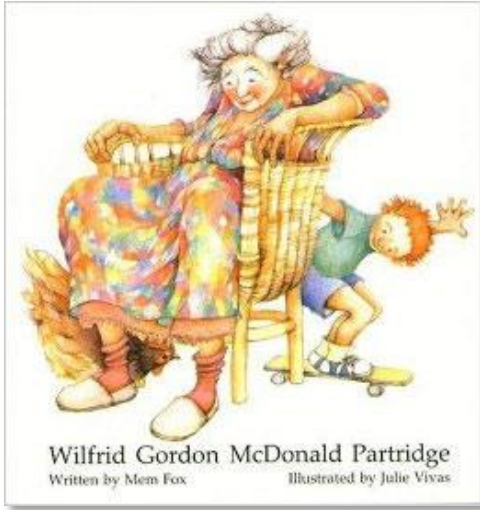


A Tale of Two Beasts

By Fiona Robertson

Kirkus Reviews, STARRED (January 15, 2015)

What really happened in the woods? Robertson tells her story in two parts. Part 1: A little girl, in a jaunty red beret and matching sweater, is walking home from Grandma's house when she spots a strange little creature hanging upside down from a tree branch. (It's a furry critter with a striped tail. A raccoon? A ring-tailed lemur?) She wraps him in a green scarf, names him Fang and takes him home. Though she gives him a bath, a cute outfit like hers, a bowl of nuts and a little house made from a cardboard box, he doesn't look very happy. When she opens a window to get some cool air, her strange creature rips off his new clothes and runs to freedom in the dark woods. But late one night, he appears in her bedroom window, and they frolic in the woods. Part 2 of the book tells the scary story of an innocent little critter who's minding his own business when he's ambushed by a "terrible beast"—a little girl in a jaunty red beret and matching sweater. And readers know the rest. Robertson's premise is as sublime as it is simple, with a subtle message. Brilliantly, the illustrations vary just slightly from one version of the story to the next; it's their juxtaposition with the radically different textual perspective that generates the laughs. Totally delightful. (Picture book. 3-7)



Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge

By Mem Fox, illustrated by Julie Vivas

School Library Journal, STARRED (February 1986)

A small boy, Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, knows and likes all of the old folks in the home next door, but his favorite is Miss Nancy Alison Delacourt Cooper she has four names, too. Hearing that she has lost her memory, he asks the old folks what a memory is ("Something from long ago"; "Something that makes you laugh;" "Something warm;" etc.), ponders the answers, then gathers up memories of his own (seashells collected long ago last summer, a feathered puppet with a goofy expression, a warm egg fresh from the hen) to give her. In handling Wilfrid's memories, Nancy finds and shares her own. The illustrations splashy, slightly hazy watercolors in rosy pastels contrast the boy's fidgety energy with his friends' slow, careful movements and capture the story's warmth and sentiment.